United Nations S/PV.7360

Security Council

Seventieth year

Provisional

7360th meeting
Thursday, 15 January 2015, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Muñoz/Mr. Barros Melet/Mr. Gálvez	(Chile)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gaspar Martins
	Chad	Mr. Cherif
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Jordan	Mrs. Kawar
	Lithuania	Mrs. Jakubonė
	Malaysia	Mr. Haniff
	New Zealand	Mr. McLay
	Nigeria	Mr. Laro
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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15-01357 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Algeria, Botswana, Brazil, Cuba, Egypt, Guatemala, Iceland, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Morocco, Namibia, Pakistan, Peru, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey and Zimbabwe to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jens Anders Toyberg-Frandzen, Assistant-Secretary-General ad interim for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following to participate in this meeting: His Excellency Mr. Ioannis Vrailas, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, and His Excellency Mr. Fodé Seck, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Toyberg-Frandzen.

Mr. Toyberg-Frandzen: As we commence a new year, I brief the Security Council today with a mounting sense of apprehension at the direction in which events are transpiring in the region.

Regrettably, since last month's briefing (see S/PV.7339), neither the Palestinians nor the Israelis have taken the challenging step or made the bold decision required to begin the process of reversing the ever-widening trust deficit between the two sides. Instead, we have witnessed developments that may unfortunately further reduce the likelihood of talks resuming in future.

On 30 December, a draft resolution (S/2014/916) was submitted to the Security Council seeking to reach a final status agreement and an end to the occupation by the end of 2017. The Secretary-General took note of the fact that the draft resolution failed to be adopted. However, he also believes that the status quo remains unacceptable and unsustainable, as stressed by many Council members during their statements after the voting (see S/PV.7354).

On the following day, President Abbas signed instruments of accession to 18 international treaties, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. On 2 January, 16 instruments of accession were submitted to the Secretary-General, who accepted them in deposit, after having ascertained that the instruments received were in due and proper form. On 3 January, Israel decided to freeze approximately $127 million in tax revenues collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority for the month of December, contrary to Israel's obligations under the Paris Protocol of the Oslo Accords. We call on Israel to immediately resume the transfer of tax revenues. I also note that the League of Arab States has been meeting today in Cairo to discuss the latest developments on the Palestinian issue.

The Secretary-General is alarmed that the parties are now engaged in a downward spiral of actions and counter-actions and calls on both sides to refrain from any action that would exacerbate existing divisions. While the parties are ultimately responsible, the international community must uphold its responsibility to play an active role in shepherding an effective way forward towards the two-State solution and lasting peace.

Let me turn to the situation in Gaza, where the security situation is showing signs of serious deterioration. During the reporting period, Palestinian militants fired three rockets at Israel, two of which landed within Gaza, while one landed in an open area of Israel without resulting in injuries or damage. In response, Israel conducted its first air strike into Gaza since the 26 August ceasefire. No casualties were reported. Militants also test-fired some 22 rockets at the sea. On 24 December, an exchange of fire across the border resulted in one Hamas militant killed, three

Palestinian civilians injured and one member of the Israel Defense Forces injured.

As we have consistently warned, the Strip is balancing on a tightrope that will continue to fray unless a number of critical issues, many of which are political, are tackled with both determination and a heightened sense of urgency. One of the most critical issues is the outstanding payment of salaries to Gaza employees. In late October 2014, the United Nations facilitated a one-time humanitarian payment to help temporarily address the matter. However, worryingly, there has been no progress on the issue, which is once again threatening stability in Gaza. On 14 January, dozens of former Gaza employees disrupted the weekly Cabinet meeting of the Government of National Consensus, demanding their salaries.

In addition to the salary payment issue, since the most recent briefing by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (see S/PV.7339), a number of other grave issues remain unaddressed, and the status quo is very much in place. Reconstruction is not happening at the required scale and will not be achievable without some tangible progress on a number of key issues.

After almost five months, the ceasefire agreement between Israel and the Palestinians of Gaza remains perilously fragile, and there are no indications that a return to talks under Egyptian auspices is on the immediate horizon. The Palestinian factions have unfortunately failed to overcome their divisions and agree on a united path for the Palestinian people. Further, the Government of National Consensus has not yet taken control over the civil and security institutions or the border crossings in Gaza, and there has still been no progress on civil service reform. In addition, once again Gaza is facing critical energy shortages, the severity of which is being compounded by the harsh winter conditions.

As has been repeatedly emphasized, the Gaza reconstruction mechanism is temporary and is not a substitute for the lifting of all closures on Gaza, as laid out in resolution 1860 (2009). While the mechanism has started to provide some much-needed relief to the people of Gaza, its ongoing implementation is being made increasingly difficult by the failure to address the critical issues I have just outlined.

Despite these unfavourable circumstances, I can report some positive news with regard to the implementation of the mechanism. Operations have scaled up significantly since mid-December. As of 11 January, over 38,000 individuals requiring construction material for shelter repairs have been cleared to procure materials under the mechanism; that number is well beyond the 25,000 figure predicted for the end of December in our most recent briefing (see S/PV.7339). Furthermore, over 23,000 individuals have procured construction materials. Ultimately, over 100,000 individuals are expected to access construction materials for shelter repairs through the mechanism. Large-scale projects are also now being initiated.

These developments, while positive, must be viewed in the broader, more troubling context of Gaza's overall reconstruction process. Up to 100,000 families are living in houses that have sustained varying degrees of damage, while 18 school buildings belonging to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East continue to serve as collective centres for some 15,500 internally displaced persons. Obtaining the necessary financial resources to allow Palestinians in Gaza to procure materials continues to be a monumental challenge for the majority of those in need.

Most pressingly, donors have largely failed to fulfil their pledges three months after the Cairo conference. This has severely handicapped the ability of the Government of Palestine, the United Nations and other development actors on the ground to make significant progress on recovery and reconstruction work. The importance of donors urgently meeting their pledges cannot be overstated.

Inflammatory criticism of the United Nations for its role in facilitating a temporary agreement between the Palestinian Government of National Consensus and Israel to open crossings for the import at the required scale of construction material, while also taking account of Israel's legitimate security concerns, is unhelpful. It could affect the United Nations ability to continue supporting the mechanism. The United Nations remains committed to doing all that it can to facilitate resolutions of the problems, but parties responsible for the delays need to be fully engaged as well. The stark reality of the situation demands a resolute approach on the part of all those engaged in Gaza's reconstruction — a daunting task under any circumstances.

I also encourage the Egyptian authorities to reopen the Rafah crossing, while taking into account Egypt's legitimate security concerns. Humanitarian concerns

are growing, with around 17,000 registered people, including patients, waiting to exit Gaza, in addition to 37,000 others who wish to exit Gaza.

Meanwhile, violence is continuing in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. As of 12 January, Israeli security forces conducted some 390 search-and-arrest operations during the reporting period, resulting in the arrest of at least 500 Palestinians. Two Palestinians, including a teenager, were shot and killed by Israeli security forces, and 145 Palestinians, including 60 children and 4 women, were injured during security operations. Palestinians injured three Israeli security personnel, including one during violent protests. Overall, in 2014 Israeli forces killed 54 Palestinians and injured some 5,800 in the West Bank — the largest number of injuries recorded in a single year since 2005 and the largest number of fatalities since 2007. During the same period, Palestinian attacks resulted in 15 Israeli fatalities and some 270 Israeli injuries in the West Bank and Israel, which is the largest number of injuries recorded in a single year since 2006 and the largest number of fatalities since 2008.

Daily clashes continued to take place between Palestinians and Israeli settlers during the reporting period, resulting in two Palestinians, including one child, being injured. Settlers also reportedly damaged some 5,000 Palestinian olive tree saplings, while Palestinians injured nine Israelis in the West Bank, including three children and two women. The demolition of Palestinian structures in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, continued during the reporting period. A total of 60 structures, including 17 residences, were demolished, leading to the displacement of some 47 Palestinians, including 16 children.

We are encouraged by the Israeli Supreme Court's decision of 25 December ordering the evacuation and demolition of Amona, the largest settlement outpost in the West Bank, within two years, and look forward to the swift execution of that judgment. The United Nations reiterates its call on the Israeli authorities to freeze and reverse all settlement activities in the occupied territory.

Before closing, let me say a few words about Syria and Lebanon.

On Syria, separate consultations continued with the Syrian parties and a wide range of interlocutors inside and outside Syria on the parameters of the freeze, starting with Aleppo city. The Special Envoy and his Deputy intend to return to Syria in the coming days to pursue the discussions that were launched in mid-December with the Government of Syria on implementation before being able to brief the Council on progress achieved. In the meantime, the Office of the Special Envoy is closely following developments relating to the Cairo and Moscow forum meetings, as well as related developments with the opposition.

In Lebanon, the dialogue between the Future Movement and Hizbullah, facilitated by Speaker Berri, started on 23 December. Two rounds of talks have now taken place aimed at calming sectarian tensions and helping to resolve the deadlock over the election of a new president. Efforts are also ongoing to initiate talks between the leaders of the two largest Christian parties, Samir Geagea and Michel Aoun. We welcome and encourage dialogue among the parties in Lebanon aimed at easing tensions, addressing security threats and contributing to stability. We hope that these processes will facilitate at the earliest the election of a new president, which is long overdue.

The Lebanese Armed Forces continue efforts to secure the border with Syria. On 26 December, they killed three gunmen attempting to infiltrate near Arsal. Twenty-five Lebanese Army and security personnel remain in the captivity of the Al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. On 10 January, the Al-Nusra Front claimed responsibility for the double suicide bombing in the Alawite neighbourhood of Jabal Mohsen in Tripoli, which killed 9 people and injured over 35 others. Council members have condemned this new terrorist attack in the strongest terms. There are now over 1.1 million Syrian refugees registered in Lebanon. On 5 January, new procedures were formally introduced at entry points on the Lebanese border with Syria — a consequence of which was a restriction on the entry of refugees, except for extreme humanitarian cases.

The area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebaon (UNIFIL) remained generally calm, as both Lebanon and Israel continued to cooperate with UNIFIL through its liaison and coordination arrangements, and demonstrated their continued commitment to the cessation of hostilities and to the stability along the Blue Line in accordance with resolution 1701 (2006). In a letter dated 12 December, Israel communicated to the Council concerns about media reports about Hizbullah's military capability. It is worth reiterating that resolution 1701 (2006) calls

for the disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militants.

Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace continued on an almost daily basis, as also regularly reported by Lebanon to the Council. In accordance with resolution 1701 (2006), it is also worth reiterating the calls on Israel to cease its overflights of Lebanese airspace.

In conclusion, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is now entering unchartered territory, which, lamentably, seems to have dashed any immediate hope for a return to peace talks. We should be under no illusions about the perils that this new chapter may entail. The increasingly antagonistic and virulent nature of the discourse between the two sides should be cause for serious concern among those seeking to foster an environment conducive to a return to constructive dialogue.

The failure of the parties to take the steps necessary to overcome their mutual distrust has contributed to bringing us to this precarious phase. It is now up to both sides to determine their respective courses of action moving forward. I urge Palestinians and Israelis to plot a course that ultimately leads to a negotiated resolution of the conflict on the basis of a two-state solution in which Israel and Palestine live side by side in peace and security. The alternative is fraught with unknown hazards that may be irreversible.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Toyberg-Frandzen for his important briefing to the Council.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): On behalf of the State of Palestine, I congratulate the friendly country of Chile on its presidency of the Security Council and wish it every success in steering the important agenda of work. We are confident in its able leadership. We also welcome you, Mr. Heraldo Muñoz, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chile, to preside over today's important debate. I also express our appreciation to the delegation of Chad for its honourable and capable stewardship of the Council in December. Allow me also to thank Assistant Secretary-General ad interim Toyberg-Frandzen for his briefing this morning.

I also extend the warm congratulations of the State of Palestine to the new members of the Security Council — the friendly countries of Angola, Malaysia, New Zealand, Spain and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela — as they assume their solemn responsibilities to uphold the Council's Charter duties, its resolutions and international law. We pledge to them, as to all the members of the Council, our full support and cooperation, and express confidence in their principled service on the Council.

We return to the Security Council after its failure, once again, to uphold its duties vis-à-vis the Palestine question and to genuinely contribute to the efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and forge a credible path for peace. We regret that the Council as a whole was unable to rise to the occasion, even as the situation is acknowledged by all to be completely unsustainable and to constitute a threat to peace and security in the Middle East and globally.

The draft resolution (S/2014/916) that was presented to the Security Council by Jordan on behalf of the Arab Group was in substance fully consistent with the demands made in previous resolutions. Those resolutions continue to be flagrantly violated by Israel, the occupying Power, and the Council continues to allow that to occur without consequence. While the draft resolution met with strong resistance, the reality is that the elements it contained are essential for achieving a just peace and have been unanimously supported by the international community for decades.

That includes, inter alia, the reaffirmation of parameters based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative; the calls for the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, and for bringing an end to the occupation in all manifestations, including the illegal settlement enterprise, for the achievement of the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders; and the call for a just solution to the Palestine refugee question based on resolution 194 (III) and the Arab Peace Initiative. The draft resolution also rightly set a deadline for an end to the Israeli occupation, an objective that cannot be logically rejected by anyone, and rightly called for an international conference as the starting point and framework for any negotiations forward, recognizing the failure of the negotiations for more than 20 years and also the need for clear responsibilities of major stakeholders in shepherding the effort.

That initiative was intended to revitalize the international consensus and efforts for a just solution and to open doors for peace through such a new

mechanism and clarity on the parameters of a peaceful solution and the end goals. Yet it was illogically treated as a confrontational and irrational effort and, regrettably, obstructed.

In spite of that setback, we will continue to approach the Security Council. We are determined in our pursuit of this peaceful, political, diplomatic and legal path towards the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and their legitimate national aspirations and the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. Those goals are shared by the international community. This principal organ of the United Nations should not be absolved of its responsibilities in that regard.

How could we cease our appeals to the Security Council as long as the Israeli occupation of our land, and the endless crises and human suffering it causes, continues? How could we cease our calls for international support and action while our people continue to be denied their freedom and liberty — continue to be brutally oppressed — and this historic injustice persists? As we sit here in the Council Chamber, the situation is deteriorating and becoming more fragile and volatile by the day, while a peaceful solution remains elusive due to a lack of political will and the intransigence of Israel, which carries on with blatant impunity with zero accountability.

In the Holy City of Jerusalem, tensions are raging as Israeli violations and crimes push the situation to a precipice. Every day we are witness to Israel's rapid settlement colonization, altering the City's demography and character and further surrounding and isolating it; heavy-handed raids and repression of the Palestinian civilian population; vicious "price tag" attacks by Israeli settlers, who continue to harass and assault Palestinians and seize Palestinian homes, with the full backing of the Government; and ongoing provocations and incitement by Israeli politicians and religious leaders, along with other Jewish extremists who continue to raid and defile holy sites, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, and to attack worshippers and other civilians in violent rampages of hatred, discrimination and superiority. The rising fury and despair in occupied East Jerusalem constitutes an extremely toxic situation that could erupt at any moment, including in the form of religious conflict.

In the rest of the West Bank, Israel also continues its illegal settlement activities — doing the exact opposite of what is required to end this insidious occupation. Israel has totally undermined the two-State solution for peace by constructing settlements, expropriating land, building the wall, demolishing homes and displacing civilians, in grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and in flagrant contempt of the global demands to stop that illegal campaign. Settlers also continue to terrorize and torment Palestinian civilians and to wreak havoc and destruction. Military raids and arrests and detentions continue, day and night, with more than 6,800 Palestinians, including children, women and elected officials, now imprisoned by Israel under dire conditions. Israel has yet to be held accountable for all those grave crimes.

The humanitarian disaster wilfully and wantonly inflicted by Israel, the occupying Power, in the Gaza Strip last summer is worsening beyond comprehension. The illegal Israeli blockade, delays in reconstruction, a fuel and water crisis and fierce winter storms are compounding the unimaginable suffering of the Palestinian civilian population and further exposing the lasting impact of the crimes perpetrated by the Israeli occupying forces. Massive flooding has further displaced civilians, in addition to the 110,000 people displaced following Israel's destruction of their homes and neighbourhoods. In the bitter cold, families continue to shelter in United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) schools, in makeshift homes and even in the ruins and rubble of what remains of their homes, where they struggle to survive with minimal food, water, sanitation and other human necessities.

Despite the obstruction and collective punishment caused by the Israeli blockade, the Palestinian Government of National Consensus, under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah, continues its efforts to advance reconstruction and tend to the needs of our people in Gaza. However, it must be recognized that the massive scope and scale of this disaster, on both the human and the physical levels, would present a formidable challenge to even the strongest and most capable Government.

We call on the international community to demand that Israel immediately end its blockade of the Gaza Strip and allow for unimpeded humanitarian access, the movement of persons into and out of Gaza, the entry of all necessary supplies, including construction materials and exports, and that it honour pledges to support reconstruction. Without that, it will be next

to impossible to address urgent humanitarian needs, rebuild Gaza, ease the isolation and trauma of our people there or revive any semblance of an economy.

In addition to the brutalization and collective punishment of our people and the colonization of our land, Israel, the occupying Power, is again withholding Palestinian tax revenues, in a blatant act of reprisal and theft of Palestinian funds. This kind of retribution has been condemned by the international community before and should be once again. The international community should demand that Israel release our tax revenues, which are vital to the functioning of Government institutions, including for education, health, security, sanitation and social welfare services. Such vulgar and illegal behaviour by Israel should not be tolerated or excused, for it can only encourage its contempt for the law and impunity.

In that regard, it must be clearly stated: the recent accessions by the State of Palestine to international conventions and treaties, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), are legal, peaceful steps that should be welcomed by the international community. There should be no doubt about Palestine's commitment to international law and peace. Palestine should not be punished for that proven commitment. To do so is wrong and perverse, and no rational, law-abiding and peaceful person or country can condone it.

We are compelled to remind the international community that there is no symmetry or balance in this conflict. There is an occupier imposing and entrenching a nearly half-century-long military occupation in the most vicious, lethal and destructive ways. And there is an occupied people seeking their liberty, rights and justice through peaceful, political and legal means despite the oppression and crimes they have been mercilessly subjected to for decades.

It defies logic, and of course the law, to excuse and absolve the violator — Israel, the occupying Power — of any culpability, instead threatening and punishing those — the Palestinian people — who are merely seeking their human rights, foremost their right to be free and independent.

We therefore express appreciation for the statements issued by Governments, intergovernmental organizations and human rights groups in support of Palestine's accessions and against Israeli reprisals. We are also grateful for the principled statement, on 7 January, by the President of the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute, Mr. Sidiki Kaba, who welcomed the deposit by the State of Palestine of the instruments of accession to the Rome Statute and stressed that

> "Each ratification of the Rome Statute constitutes welcome progress towards its universality. I call on all members of the United Nations to join this permanent and independent system of international justice to fight against impunity and prevent the most serious crimes under international law."

The State of Palestine responded in a positive way to that call, and I am proud to say that we will be the one hundred and twenty-third member State of the Rome Statute.

While recognizing the many serious threats and problems in our world, we must conclude by asking how the international community can allow the Security Council to remain paralysed, while the Palestinian-Israeli conflict continues to burn, inflaming tensions and further destabilizing the situation in an already volatile region? How long can the international community stand aside while this injustice continues and the Palestinian people continue to be denied their rights and freedoms, the same rights and freedoms so staunchly defended everywhere else around the world?

We can no longer wait. After nearly seven decades of Al-Nakba and nearly five decades of occupation, we can no longer accept being told to wait for the fulfillment of our rights. The Palestinian people and leadership have been more than patient, more than reasonable and more than steadfast. History will clearly attest to that resolve in the face of such grave injustice.

Neither can we continue to accept being told to wait to seek accountability for Israeli violations against our people. This is based on our firm conviction that accountability and compelling respect for the law are crucial to deterring further crimes against our people, making the Israeli occupation too costly, hastening an end to this tragic conflict and realizing justice and peace.

The focus now must be on implementing the law and ensuring responsibility for the gross human rights violations, breaches of humanitarian law war crimes that have been perpetrated, rather than on punitive measures meant to exact retribution for a commitment to international law. The focus must be on ending this

illegitimate, belligerent, colonial Israeli occupation in all its manifestations and realizing the international consensus for a peaceful solution.

We will thus continue to reject all of the irrational arguments against our peaceful, nonviolent, political, diplomatic and legal endeavours and will continue on this path for justice and peace. At the same time, we will persist in our appeals to all peace-loving countries and peoples to continue their principled solidarity and support in this effort to uphold international law and to realize the rights of the Palestinian people. These include self-determination in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and just solutions for all core issues, including the plight of the Palestine refugees, based on the relevant resolutions and international law.

Despite the recent setback in the Council, we are hopeful and confident that this global support and solidarity, as well as the needed political and moral responsibility, will be forthcoming, extending the spirit and momentum of the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, towards the attainment of the just, lasting and comprehensive peace we have so long been seeking.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Prosor (Israel): I congratulate Chile for its able stewardship of the Security Council this month. I thank Foreign Minister Heraldo Muñoz for being here today to preside over this session. Allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate the new non-permanent members of the Security Council: Angola, Malaysia, New Zealand, Spain, and Venezuela. I welcome them and wish them good luck. They will need every bit of it.

I cannot begin without addressing the tragic events that took place in France last week in which radical Islamists launched an attack against our way of life. The slogan of the French Republic is Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité-Liberty, Equality, and Brotherhood. These are the very values that are being attacked. The terrorists who stormed the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* attacked liberty and the right of every person to express himself or herself. The terrorist who targeted Jews in a kosher grocery store attacked equality: the idea that every person, no matter his faith, is equal. By aiming their attacks at innocent civilians, the terrorists also attacked brotherhood: the bonds of our shared humanity.

The world responded in force. "Je suis Charlie" and "Je suis juif" became rallying calls to defend our way of life. Millions of people took to the streets of Paris, and tens of thousands of people from Boston to Brussels to Buenos Aires rallied to honour the 17 victims who were murdered. Just as we stood united on the streets, we must remain united in our commitment to uphold freedom.

Make no mistake. Freedom is under attack throughout the world. We see it in Nigeria, where innocent people were cut down by gunfire and a ten-year-old girl was strapped into a suicide vest and sent into a crowded market. We see it in Pakistan, where children were gunned down as they sat in their classrooms. We see it in Syria and Iraq, where journalists are savagely murdered. We see it in Saudi Arabia, where a blogger was sentenced to 1,000 lashes for running a website promoting free speech. And, we see it in Iran, where 15 people were executed on New Year's Day. A war is being waged against human dignity and human rights, and we must fight back. Standing united with courage and conviction, we can turn back the tide of violent extremism and safeguard the values that we all cherish.

Israel has been fighting to defend its values since its establishment. Surrounded by extremist groups committed to our destruction, we have been forced to fight wars and endure wave after wave of terrorism. We have buried too many sons and daughters and shed too many tears, but we have never abandoned the dream of peace.

In 1967, eight Arab Heads of State attended a summit in Khartoum to formulate the policies of the Arab States in the conflict with Israel. They emerged with their famous three 'no's': no negotiations, no recognition of Israel, and no peace. Even when it seemed impossible, Israel continued to strive for peace.

Egypt and Jordan came to understand that while we are not brothers in faith, we are brothers in fate, with a shared destiny in the Middle East. Today, other Arab nations in our region also recognize that radical Islamists are not just a threat to Israel, but they are a threat to their own stability and existence. Egypt and Jordan abandoned the three 'no's' and made peace with Israel.

The Palestinians, however, are chained to the past. Weighed down by resentment and bound in hatred, the Palestinian leadership refuses to abandon the rhetoric and seek reconciliation. Decades after other Arab

nations sought to end our conflict, the Palestinian leadership remains committed to the three no's. It will not negotiate, it will not recognize Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people, and it will not make peace.

The Palestinian leadership has said no to negotiations. The Palestinians are under the impression that the United Nations is their personal vending machine: they can insert grievances and dispense claims against Israel at will. Ever since the United Nations voted to accept the Palestinians as a non-member observer State in 2012, the Palestinians have discovered that the United Nations is the gift that keeps on giving. This institution gives and gives and does not expect anything in return.

When it comes to making New Year's resolutions, I can assure you that the Palestinian resolution imposing terms for a peace deal was not what we had in mind. I would be hard-pressed to conceive of a more biased proposal. It did not address Israel's long-term security needs. It did not demand an end to Palestinian terrorism, and it did not recognize Israel as the nation State of the Jewish people. All it did was impose an arbitrary one-year deadline that would have allowed the Palestinians to run out the clock and get a State without giving anything in return. You cannot wave a magic wand and hope that all of the critical issues such as borders, security arrangements, water allocation and the "claim of return" will magically be resolved.

Rather than engage in negotiations, President Abbas is cultivating impossible fantasies. In November, he told an Egyptian newspaper that millions of Palestinians wish to return, and he will not close the door to them. Demanding that millions of Palestinians flood the Jewish State is a euphemism — there is no other word for it — for the destruction of the State of Israel.

The proposals put forward in this Council dictate what Israel should do and the Palestinians should get. Aside from being deeply biased, the Council is indulging their delusions. Every nation that voted in favour of the Palestinian one-sided resolution encouraged them to continue what I would describe as a diplomatic triathlon: running away from negotiations, placing hurdles in the peace process, and cycling towards protracted conflict.

Some nations on this Council claim that they voted for the Palestinian resolution to encourage Israelis and Palestinians to resume peace negotiations. One Government even explained that it was trying to prevent the Palestinians from joining the International Criminal Court (ICC). Really? You do not have to be Inspector Clouseau to know that this is what the Palestinians wanted all along.

The international community endorsed a road map to peace, but the Palestinians have found every off-ramp and detour. They are looking for shortcuts and quick fixes where none exists, and in the process, they are politicizing another international body. It is extremely convenient that the Palestinian Authority has asked that the Court's jurisdiction to extend back to June 13, 2014. That is, surprisingly, the day after three Israeli teenagers were kidnapped and murdered by Palestinian terrorists. By choosing to go to the ICC, the Palestinians have reinforced the message that they are not interested in negotiating and they are not willing to compromise. The international community must stop encouraging this march of folly. It must tell the Palestinians that the claim of return is a nonstarter, make it clear that peace requires compromise and insist that they return to direct negotiations.

The Palestinian leadership has said, "no" to the recognition of Israel as the nation-State of the Jewish people. Israel is our historical homeland. When I walk the streets of Jerusalem, I am walking in the footsteps of our forefathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When I stand at the Western Wall, I can feel thousands of years of Jewish prayers and dreams. When I traverse our small State, history comes alive. I see the valley where David battled Goliath, the hills where Isaiah prophesized about beating our swords into plowshares and the mountains where Elijah saw a vision of peace. Israel has been our land for 3,800 years, and we are here to stay.

Nothing can change the historical facts. Yet the Palestinian Authority has made a career of denying the facts. Here is a fact the Council members may not know. President Mahmoud Abbas is currently in his tenth year of a five year presidential term. He is willing to say anything and do anything to cling to power. Last year, the Palestinian Authority committed every form of diplomatic treachery. It abandoned peace talks, formed a Government with the Hamas terrorist group, awarded honours to convicted terrorists and broke its word by signing dozens of international conventions. Its leadership delivered a hate-fuelled speech against Israel here in the General Assembly, called for violent "Days of Rage" and urged Palestinians to prevent Jews from visiting the Temple Mount using "all means necessary".

The international community has not challenged the Palestinian leadership on any of these crimes. Instead, it is giving them a free pass and sending a message that they can incite violence that leads to terrorist attacks with impunity. The international community is literally letting them get away with murder. President Abbas's hateful speeches have sparked dozens of violent riots. Palestinian terrorists have shot and stabbed our citizens and driven their cars into crowds of pedestrians. The wave of terrorism shows no sign of abating. Just a few weeks ago, Palestinian terrorists threw a firebomb at a car carrying 11 year-old Ayala Shapira. The little girl suffered third-degree burns over much of her body and face. As we speak she is fighting for her life in hospital. Does that disgusting attack on a child not merit condemnation? Because I have not heard one — not from the Palestinian leadership nor from this Council.

The international community must demand more from the Palestinians. Make it clear that fostering a culture of hatred is unacceptable. Make it clear that there is no impunity for intolerance and send the message that the path to peace begins with the recognition of Israel as the nation-State of the Jewish people.

The Palestinian leadership has said "no", to peace. Israel is committed to peace. No one understands what is at stake more than we do, It is our cities and our citizens that terrorists are targeting. At Camp David in 2000 and again at Annapolis in 2008, Israeli leaders made far-reaching offers that could have led to the creation of a Palestinian State. Those offers were met by deliberate evasion, outright rejection and waves of terrorism. Israel has made concession after concession and received nothing in return.

Forging a lasting peace requires courage and political capital, and the Palestinian leadership is in short supply of both. The Palestinian Authority has no authority over the Gaza Strip. Hence it has no authority over nearly half of the territory and 40 per cent of the population it claims to represent, and it certainly has not demonstrated a willingness to assist the people of Gaza. When this Council tried to pass a resolution to speed up the delivery of construction materials into Gaza, the Palestinian President dragged his feet, obstructed the process and eventually abandoned the proposition altogether. The Palestinian Authority agreed to take responsibility for monitoring the crossings and then never showed up.

What about the Arab nations? The oil-rich Arab nations pledge funds, but the pipelines seem to have run dry. Israel, on the other hand, is taking meaningful steps to rebuild Gaza. The Palestinian Authority is missing in action. Its leadership could not even find the time to visit Gaza. They have left their people to suffer under the tyranny of Hamas. That terrorist organization sends teenagers to terrorist training camps, condones honour killings, punishes homosexuality with death and encourages public executions. Instead of condemning Hamas for its crimes, the Palestinian leadership formed a Government with a terrorist group that is more interested in tearing Israel down than building the Palestinian people up.

In December, Hamas celebrated its twenty-seventh anniversary by burning effigies of Jews and parading trucks carrying long-range rockets through the streets of Gaza. At the celebration, Hamas military spokesman Abu Obeida publicly thanked Iran and Qatar for supplying the group with arms and support. Those rogue regimes have enabled Hamas and Fatah to commit countless war crimes. Over the summer, Hamas and Fatah terrorists fired rockets from mosques, stored weapons in schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, used Gaza hospitals as military headquarters and sent children to rooftops as human shields. The evidence is overwhelming, yet the international community has failed to hold the Palestinians to account.

Hamas is once again preparing to go on the offensive by rearming, rebuilding its terror infrastructure and reaffirming its commitment to waging war against Israel. It has tested and fired dozens of rockets, it is aggressively taxing its people to fund its terror enterprise, and it is stealing cement — I will repeat that; stealing cement — intended for humanitarian purposes to rebuild its terror tunnels.

I find it curious that many of those facts — not alleged facts, not reported facts, but real facts — were omitted from this morning's report. The great American statesman Daniel Patrick Moynihan once said, "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts". This Council would be better served if it would be presented with more facts and fewer opinions in the monthly reports.

What has been the response from the international community? The more the Palestinian leadership says "no", the more "yes" votes it seems to garner in this institution. European nations claim to stand for human rights and civil liberties, but with every passing day I am given more reason to be a Euro-skeptic. Every

European Union parliament that voted to prematurely recognize the Palestinian State was rewarding terrorism, and the decision by the Court of Justice of the European Union in Luxembourg to remove Hamas from its list of terrorist organizations was a victory for terrorism. The Court claimed the decision was simply a technical matter. Really? Well, I can tell you that there was nothing technical about the thousands of rockets that Hamas fired into Israel, or the innocent civilians that the group kidnapped and killed. No amount of Swiss chocolate, Belgian waffles or fine French wine can mask the unpleasant taste this leaves in our mouths. It is time for the nations that believe in liberty and democracy to stand with the only liberal democracy in the Middle East.

The results of unchecked extremism may have just arrived at Europe's doorstep, but we have been combatting radical groups since our establishment. Every day we confront Hamas in Gaza, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in the north, Jihadi groups in the Sinai, and Hizbullah in southern Lebanon. Iran is bankrolling Hizbullah with $200 million a year to wage war on its behalf. It is training terrorists and smuggling weapons in blatant violation of resolutions 1701 (2006) and 1747 (2007). Hizbullah has amassed well over 100,000 sophisticated missiles and rockets and senior Hizbullah officials regularly threaten to use them.

Last month a senior United Nations official declared that the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon had "seen no evidence of unauthorized weapons or weapons transfers in its area of operations". Really? Clearly the United Nations has tuned out, because if it were tuned in to the news it would know that Hassan Nasrallah and other senior officials regularly boast about the size and sophistication of Hizbullah's arsenal. Hizbullah's Deputy Secretary General, Naim Qassem, was quoted in an Iranian newspaper as saying that Hizbullah was in possession of missiles with pinpoint accuracy, and that with the Islamic Republic's support it would be ready for any future war. The terror group even published a map showing the locations of their Fateh missiles in Lebanon and made the threat that they can strike anywhere in Israel. Hizbullah has the capabilities and it has made its intentions very clear. The threat to our region is real and it is imminent. The international community can no longer afford to ignore the warning signs. Israel will not stand idly by as Iran continues to arm its terrorist proxies. We will act to defend our citizens.

Winston Churchill once said that all the greatest things are simple, and many can be expressed in a single word, such as "freedom", "honour" and "hope". Israel stands for freedom and honour and hope. It is the only State in the Middle East that defends the right of all people to practice their religion as they choose. It is the only country in the region with a free press, free elections and free speech. It is the only country in the Middle East where women have presided over each of the three branches of Government. Israel is on the right side of the moral divide.

The question is, which side will the Security Council stand on? If it opposes terrorism and oppression, it must stand with the Middle East's only democracy. Tell the Palestinians that while we might have a territorial dispute, Israel's right to live in security is beyond dispute. Make it clear that unilateral actions are no substitute for meaningful dialogue. And send the message to the Palestinian leadership that they must say yes to the recognition of Israel as the nation State of the Jewish people, yes to direct negotiations and through that, yes to peace.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chile.

I welcome this opportunity to preside over this debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. Chile is home to a large colony of people of Palestinian origin, the largest outside the Middle East, and a smaller but significant Jewish community that is fully integrated into Chilean society, living in peace and harmony. Chile recognized the State of Israel early on; in addition, it was one of the first South American countries to open a diplomatic presence in Ramallah. In January 2011, we recognized the State of Palestine and supported its full membership in UNESCO the same year. In 2012, Chile was a sponsor of the General Assembly resolution accepting Palestine as a United Nations non-member observer State (General Assembly resolution 67/19). We view those actions as a contribution to the peace process, strengthening the capacity of the Palestinian State and creating the conditions for better institution-building.

A little more than two decades after the Oslo Accords between the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), those provisional dispositions have stood the test of time. Unfortunately, after years both of progress and too many setbacks in

the negotiations, a two-State solution — in accordance with United Nations resolutions and the terms of reference we are all familiar with on the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State, living in peace and security side by side with the State of Israel, within secure and internationally recognized borders — is still not a reality.

It is discouraging that, for the first time in all these years, there is no peace plan on the table. That sends an extremely negative political signal. In 2014, for the third time in six years, we witnessed new outbreaks of armed violence between factions in the Gaza Strip. We saw Hamas launching rockets indiscriminately against Israel's civilian population, and disproportionate military action against Palestinians, resulting in more than 2,000 deaths, mostly of women and children, and thousands of new internally displaced persons in an already saturated region. Chile has condemned all such actions threatening life, peace and security. The West Bank and East Jerusalem have also been the scene of tensions, fanning fears of a possible third intifada. This shows that the status quo is unsustainable. A new approach is needed, supported by at least a minimal degree of political will.

First, the parties must build trust and strengthen their dialogue. That requires continued action and an end to unilateral acts and violent rhetoric. As we stated at the recent Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, most of the international community is urging Israel, as the occupying Power in the occupied Palestinian territory, to abide by international standards for human rights and international humanitarian law. Similarly, unilateral acts such as the illegal settlement policy, the actions of extremist settlers, the eviction of Palestinian families from their homes and collective punishments such as demolition of the houses of people presumed to be involved in terrorist acts must cease. They constitute extra-judicial measures incompatible with the democratic character of the State of Israel.

The current situation does nothing to help President Abbas or the leadership of the PLO. On the contrary, it favours the position of radical elements. The international community must continue to support the Palestinian Authority and encourage it, through a process of internal reconciliation, to emphatically distance itself from the extremist narrative of groups that only foster hatred and violence and do not recognize Israel's right to exist.

Secondly, we need a more forceful international approach. We appreciate the sustained effort of the United States to advance the peace negotiations. That is an important part of a broader political approach that should involve the multilateral system as a whole. In Chile's view, it is essential that the Security Council define the parameters for the negotiations. The new approach should provide for greater involvement of the European Union, the League of Arab States and the Middle East Quartet. Chile calls for a general dialogue on the Arab Peace Initiative, based on the principle of land for peace.

Lastly, I should like to reiterate that Chile will continue to encourage Palestine and Israel to make progress towards a just and lasting peace. We have a hope, though a faint hope, that this is possible. The time has come to restore trust, resume negotiations and end this long and painful conflict.

Concerning the conflict in Syria, my country reiterates that political dialogue is the only solution to the conflict. In that regard, we support the work of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura. Chile also commends the efforts of the Russian Government to convene a peace dialogue to which various opposition groups have been invited. We hope that representatives of all Syrian political tendencies will participate and take the opportunity to contribute to identifying points of convergence that could point to a way out of the crisis.

Chile reiterates its condemnation of the violence against civilians, especially women and children, perpetrated by all the parties to the conflict. We believe it is crucial that steps be taken to protect the most vulnerable populations and hold the perpetrators of such crimes accountable. In that regard, one priority is for the parties to the conflict to allow access to the humanitarian aid needed to mitigate the effects of the violence.

It is clear that as long as there is no solution to the conflict in Syria, its neighbours, especially Lebanon, will continue to have to deal with a delicate situation. Chile commends the Lebanese Government's willingness to take in more than 1 million Syrian nationals, despite the challenges that brings. We urge that other countries in the region cooperate in order to assist the thousands of Syrian families who are seeking better living conditions. In that context, I can announce that Chile is contemplating the possibility of taking in more families of Syrian and Palestinian origin.

In view of the resurgence of numerous armed groups along the border with Syria, Chile reiterates the importance of respecting the principle of dissociation outlined in the Baabda Declaration and preventing the involvement there of other armed factions, especially Hizbullah, which aggravates sectarian divisions. We strongly condemn the double attack of 10 January in Tripoli and recall the press statement issued by the Council.

Finally, we view it as crucial to reaffirm the importance of resolutions 2170 (2014), on threats to international peace and security posed by terrorist attacks, and 2178 (2014), on foreign terrorist fighters, in keeping with the obligations on States under international law.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to the other members of the Security Council.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank and welcome you, Sir. We are grateful to have you here to chair a meeting on such critically important issues and we are appreciative of Chile's leadership every day.

We thank Assistant Secretary-General ad interim Toyberg-Frandzen for his informative briefing.

Today I will speak on three topics: Syria, Lebanon and the Middle East peace.

On Syria, we welcome the efforts of United Nations Special Envoy de Mistura to establish a freeze in the city of Aleppo. Any freeze must be consistent with humanitarian principles and include measures to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance. It should also reduce violence, not provide cover for any side to advance military aims, such as redeploying forces, and we welcome serious efforts to advance a political dialogue consistent with the second Geneva communiqué, including those led by Special Envoy de Mistura. There is no military solution to this devastating conflict, only a political solution.

In meeting after meeting before the Council, we have presented mounting evidence of the unspeakable atrocities perpetrated by the Al-Assad regime. This meeting is no exception. Since we last met to discuss Syria, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) released its third report, with further evidence indicating that the regime has repeatedly use chlorine as a weapon against civilians, directly violating international norms and Syria's international legal obligations. Investigators concluded "with a high degree of confidence" that chlorine gas was used against three opposition-controlled villages and Syria last year. In one affected village, 32 of the 37 people interviewed by OPCW investigators "saw or heard the sound of a helicopter over the village at the time of the attack with barrel bombs containing toxic chemicals". Of the forces fighting in Syria, only the Al-Assad regime uses helicopters and only the Al-Assad regime drops barrel bombs.

The Council must stop the Al-Assad regime's use of chemical weapons and ensure that it has fully declared and verifiably eliminated its chemical weapons programme, as required by resolution 2118 (2013) and by the Chemical Weapons Convention. We vigorously condemn the use of chemical weapons by any party anywhere.

The use of chemical weapons is far from the regime's only deplorable act. As Under-Secretary-General Amos informed the Council one month ago today (see S/PV.7342), the use of barrel bombs against civilians has been particularly acute in Aleppo, Hama, Idlib, rural Damascus, Deir ez-Zor, Raqqa and Dar'a, and the regime continues to systematically use torture as a means of inflicting suffering and extracting information. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, at least 2,100 people died in Syrian prisons last year, and the bodies of many showed signs of torture. Because the Observatory only counts cases in which families have received a corpse or a death certificate, they believe the actual number to be much higher. This is consistent with the abhorrent practices of the Al-Assad regime brought to light by the Syrian defector Caesar.

Al-Assad, those around him and any individuals overseeing or complicit in the commission of serious crimes in Syria must know that they will ultimately be held accountable. That is why the United States is actively supporting the collection and preservation of evidence to support future justice processes in a variety of jurisdictions for war crimes and other human rights violations, including those involving sexual and gender-based violence. Those overseeing or complicit in these crimes must be aware that the international community is building case files on its abuses, and the files are growing. In the meantime, the immense suffering and insecurity caused by the regime's brutality and by the extremist groups, like the Islamic State in Iraq and

the Levant (ISIL) and the Al-Nusra Front, continue to deepen the most severe humanitarian catastrophe in a generation. Approximately 12.2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria; some 5.5 million of them children — 5.5 million children. Around 7.6 million people have been displaced within Syria and more than 3 million Syrians have become refugees.

On 2 January, the Italian Coast Guard intercepted a crewless ship floating 40 miles of the country's coast. Approximately 400 people, including many women and children, were on board, huddled together for warmth in containers originally built to transport livestock. Most of them were Syrians fleeing the civil war and had been abandoned on the ship by their smugglers and left for dead. People abandoned, freezing and starving in containers built for animals — that is what Al-Assad's brutality has done to Syrians. And this is not an isolated incident: days earlier, Italy's Coast Guard had intercepted another crewless ship as it steamed towards a collision with the coast with nearly 800 Syrians packed on board.

In the face of such unprecedented need and desperation, all countries can and must do more, including by supporting the countries that are already hosting the majority of Syrian refugees and making robust contributions to the United Nations enormous $8.4 billion humanitarian appeal.

No country has taken in more Syrian refugees than Lebanon, which is host to more than 1.1 million Syrians and is facing growing challenges in getting their basic needs, especially with the onset of winter. We encourage Lebanon and all receiving countries to coordinate closely with Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the development of criteria to ensure that those fleeing violence and persecution are able to enter these countries, just as we encourage Governments across the region and around the world to provide refuge for asylum-seekers, in accordance with international humanitarian principles.

Lebanon deserves the election of a president and fully empowered Government to help deal with the considerable challenges the country faces. Electing a president is, of course, a Lebanese decision, but it is one that must be taken now for the sake of the Lebanese people.

The suffering inside Syria is not limited to Syrians. Some 18,000 civilians are trapped in Yarmouk, the vast majority of them Palestinian refugees. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East estimates that 400 food parcels are needed daily to make the population's minimum needs. Yet over the past month, only 36 parcels in total have been distributed. That is 36 parcels distributed during a time when a minimum of 12,000 parcels were needed.

Assad's brutality has helped fuel the rise of violent extremist groups like ISIL and the Al-Nusra Front, which are spreading terror and instability across the region. The United States and partner nations are committed to continuing to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL through operations in Syria, as well as in Iraq at the request of the Iraqi Government. Together with our partners, we are committed to rooting out ISIL's safe havens in the region. We commend Iraqi Prime Minister Al Abadi for his outreach in the region and to all of Iraq's communities, an effort that has consolidated his broad-based support. We urge his Government to continue along the path towards genuine inclusion of all groups in the political, economic and security future of the country.

The spread of ISIL, the Al-Nusra Front and other extremist groups also threatens a security of Iraq and Syria's neighbours, most directly Lebanon. Hizbullah's involvement in the conflict in Syria violates Lebanon's policy of disassociation and has made Lebanon a target for violent extremist attacks. On 10 January, extremists staged a double suicide bombing in a café in the Jabal Mohsen neighbourhood of Tripoli, Lebanon, in which 9 people were killed and dozens more injured. Yet if the attackers' aim was to divide Lebanon, they failed. A full range of Sunni, Shia and Christian Lebanese leaders firmly the condemned the attack as did a broad swathe of Lebanese society, who rallied behind the Lebanese armed forces in pursuing those responsible. The Lebanese people also vigorously condemned the attack. In the days following it, the Twitter hash-tag #JesuisJabalMohsen was a top-trending tweet in Lebanon.

Lastly let me turn to the Middle East. For decades, the United States has worked to try to help achieve a comprehensive end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Immense though the challenges may be, we firmly believe that they can and must be overcome because the status quo is unsustainable. We remain committed to achieving the peace that both Palestinians and Israelis deserve: two States for two peoples, with a sovereign,

viable and independent Palestine, living side by side in peace and security with a Jewish and democratic Israel.

As the Council is aware, on 30 December (see S/PV.7354) the United States voted against a Security Council draft resolution (S/2014/916). We made our position clear. The draft resolution, which was hastily put to a vote, would have taken us farther from and not closer to an atmosphere that makes it possible to achieve two States for two peoples. Since that vote, the United States, represented in particular by Secretary Kerry, has reached out to both parties in an effort to try to reduce tensions and find a path forward. The Quartet envoys will meet at the end of this month to discuss the way ahead.

We continue to oppose unilateral actions by both sides that we view as detrimental to the cause of peace. Palestinian efforts to join the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and to accede to a number of international treaties are counter-productive and will not advance the aspirations of the Palestinian people for a sovereign and independent State. We urge both parties to exercise maximum restraint and avoid steps that threaten to push Israeli-Palestinian relations into a cycle of further escalation.

As we continue to work towards Israeli-Palestinian peace, we share the deep concern of the United Nations regarding the situation in Gaza. All sides must work together to accelerate efforts and increase support for rebuilding through the Gaza reconstruction mechanism. The humanitarian needs are considerable, particularly in the harsh winter months. In December, the United States announced an initial $100 million contribution to the 2015 needs of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, including in Gaza. We encourage other States to make pledges and to promptly deliver the funds that they have already promised to fully meet those urgent needs.

Mr. McLay (New Zealand): I repeat again, Sir, the personal greeting I extended to you yesterday.

While, as the Assistant Secretary-General's briefing has sadly made very clear, there are a number of regional issues that deserve consideration by the Security Council. I want to take this, our first, opportunity to outline our position on five points that guide New Zealand's approach to the Middle East peace process.

First, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has endured for too long, and its resolution is overdue. It has devastated Palestinians and Israelis alike. It contributes to insecurity and instability in the region and beyond. It is a threat to international peace and security. New Zealand therefore believes the Council does not just have a responsibility to remain seized of the issue, but that it should go further and actively promote a just and sustainable long-term peace agreement.

Secondly, a two-State solution is the only real basis for an enduring Israeli-Palestinian peace. Although final status issues can be agreed only by the parties, New Zealand believes that a two-State solution should be based on Israel and a Palestinian State existing side by side, in mutually agreed and accepted peace and security, with pre-1967 borders with agreed land swaps, a solution on the status of Jerusalem, mutual recognition, and agreement on security arrangements and refugees. None of those elements will startle anyone. The parameters are well known; most of them, over the years, were supported by the Council. Indeed, the two-State solution is almost universally supported, not least by the parties themselves. New Zealand has therefore supported initiatives towards those ends and particularly acknowledges the recent, unstinting efforts of Secretary Kerry.

Thirdly, New Zealand believes the two-State solution should be achieved by a negotiated agreement between the two parties and regrets that currently there are no such negotiations, despite sustained efforts by others, notably the United States. The parties themselves have previously supported and agreed to many of the elements of a peaceful settlement.

Fourthly, without a recommitment to negotiations, the prospects for a lasting, two-State solution will further diminish. Both sides need to cease provocations that impede peacemaking, provocations that lead Israelis to face threats to lives and communities from missile and rocket attacks, provocations that led to the devastation most recently wrought upon Gaza in July and August of the past year. Israeli settlement activity also inflames the situation and is now rapidly closing the window of opportunity for a two-State solution. Settlement activity must stop. It is illegal under international law and it is prejudicial to a just peace.

Fifthly, the status quo is unsustainable; doing nothing is simply not viable. More time — time out — will not, by itself, resolve matters. Delay only breeds further hostility. Tensions are rising, driven by a cycle of violence and loss of hope and reducing prospects of a settlement. Increased radicalization within some

Palestinian communities prompts responses from Israel. All of that means an ever-growing risk to regional and international peace and security.

For all those reasons, New Zealand believes that the failure of the Security Council to bring leadership to this issue, at this time, amounts to an abdication of its responsibilities. Arguments that the Council does not have a role or that it cannot add value can no longer be justified, particularly as other ways to find a solution simply have not succeeded. Indeed, with its primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, if the Council does not have a role in the current circumstances, it is hard to envisage when it might have such a role.

None of that diminishes in any way the ongoing efforts, particularly of the United States, to resolve the issue. United States leadership is essential; it is indispensable. But, as recent events have demonstrated, only the coordinated and focused efforts of the whole of the international community can now bring the momentum that is required. Therefore, while it is for the parties to reach final agreement, the Council can promote and support negotiations. It can legitimize any resulting agreement. And it can use its moral and legal authority and the practical tools at its disposal to shift the dynamics back to productive negotiations. We acknowledge the acute sensitivity of the conflict. We acknowledge the roles of multiple stakeholders. We acknowledge the difficulty both sides have in talking with one another. All of that justifies the Council taking a proactive role in supporting the peacemaking process.

This present debate is not the time to promote approaches that might be initiated or supported by the Council. But that time will come very soon. There are a number of possibilities that might at least lend momentum to the negotiations, that might draw on the United Nations legitimacy and convening power, that might also draw on the authority of the Security Council, that might, for example, require that the Secretary General's monthly Middle East report be more specific and more action-oriented. All those are possibilities that could support the parties working with their major stakeholders in reaching an agreement. New Zealand commits to exploring those options in an effort to inject new momentum into negotiations once elections are concluded in Israel in March. Any resumed negotiations will be no less difficult than before, but at least the Council would be better placed to play its part in moving the process forward, with momentum hopefully maintained through the good offices the United Nations, supported by the Council's authority and by its determination to support a lasting settlement.

Against that background, New Zealand supports in principle the idea of a suitably balanced Security Council draft resolution touching on the final status issues, possibly also promoting specific steps to support a resumption of negotiations. If peacemaking is to proceed with reasonable expedition, it might also be appropriate to establish a realistic time frame for completing that process. For the Council to support such a timeline does no more than others have before; Oslo and Annapolis come to mind.

New Zealand staunchly supports the existence of the State of Israel and supports its right to defend that existence in accordance with international law, and we accept that security arrangements will be fundamental to any final agreement. We will remain alert to Israel's security concerns. New Zealand likewise acknowledges that both States comprising the eventual two-State solution will be entitled to sovereignty, to security and to membership of the Organization, and consistent with that view we supported the Palestinian request to become an observer State in the General Assembly. We have told both the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority that New Zealand would positively consider contributing to any third-party presence that secures the sovereignty and security of both States, just as, since 1982 in the Sinai, we have supported the Egyptian-Israeli treaty of peace.

New Zealand has strong friendships with Israelis and Palestinians alike. In the spirit of that friendship and as an elected member, we will seek and support initiatives for the Council to speak on this issue with a more credible and authoritative voice and to use its legal powers and authorities to engage proactively towards a sustainable Middle East peace. We therefore call on the Security Council to live up to its responsibility to seek an enduring solution to that conflict.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): I thank you, Mr. President, for presiding over this open debate. I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General ad interim Toyberg-Frandzen for his briefing this morning.

We meet today for the first Middle East debate of 2015. On 30 December, in its last vote of 2014 (see S/PV.7354), the Council was divided on a draft parameters resolution (see S/2014/916) on the Middle East peace process. As I said on that occasion in my

explanation of vote, while we agreed with much of the text, which reflected long-standing United Kingdom and European Union positions, we did not agree with some elements of the text and were disappointed that there were no proper negotiations of it. Despite those divisions, the Council shares the same core commitments to a negotiated settlement that would lead to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian State, based on 1967 borders, with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both States, and a just, fair and agreed settlement for refugees.

Sadly, in 2014 the prospects for a two-State solution moved backwards rather than forwards. We believe that in 2015 the Security Council should play a meaningful role in promoting a negotiated two-State solution. In doing so, we must draw on the lessons of last year.

First, Israel and the Palestinian Authority must commit to resuming talks to allow for the political changes necessary to prevent a return to conflict. No one can fault the energy and commitment of United States mediation efforts in 2014, but courage, determination and bold leadership are necessary on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides to make the hard decisions and compromises necessary to reach a peaceful, negotiated settlement. The United Kingdom stands ready to support the efforts of international partners — including the United States, the European Union and those in the region — to encourage and assist the parties.

Secondly, all parties need to avoid taking steps that could further damage the prospects for resuming meaningful talks. We are deeply concerned by Israel's decision to freeze the transfer of tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority. That is contrary to the 1994 Paris Protocol and to Israel's obligations as an occupying Power. It risks undermining the financial stability of the Palestinian Authority and it could have serious implications for the viability of a two-State solution. We urge Israel to revoke that decision and to refrain from taking any further punitive action, including settlement announcements.

We note the Secretary-General's communication that the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court will enter into force for the Palestinians on 1 April. Our priority remains the achievement of a two-State solution, and we continue to believe that the best way to achieve that in reality and on the ground is through negotiations.

Thirdly, we must not forget Gaza. We welcome the positive steps taken by United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry to facilitate the import and use of construction materials to rebuild Gaza. But demand is not being adequately met and more needs to be done to address the humanitarian situation and kick-start Gaza's recovery.

Fourthly, we remain open to a first-ever Security Council resolution on the parameters of a two-State solution that would command full Council support. We judge that it is possible, as long as sufficient time is allowed for proper negotiation.

In Syria, we are approaching four years of brutal conflict. Well over 200,000 people have now been killed. The majority of deaths have resulted from the indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas by the Syrian regime. The repeated use of chlorine as a chemical weapon in northern Syria and the consistent reports of witnesses of the presence of helicopters at the times of the attacks leave little doubt as to the Al-Assad regime's culpability. In December 2014 alone, there were at least nine separate reported uses of chemical weapons by the regime. The Security Council needs to act on those reports. The ongoing brutality of the Al-Assad regime and its refusal to engage in a meaningful political process continue to drive the conflict and strengthen extremists such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

The United Kingdom welcomes the timely adoption of resolution 2191 (2014), which will allow humanitarian assistance to continue to be delivered in hard to reach areas within Syria, avoiding the deliberate delaying tactics that prevent crossed-line humanitarian aid delivery from regime held territory. Even last Wednesday — which, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, was the first day for more than three years when no one was reported killed by military action — six people died as a result of severe weather conditions and lack of humanitarian relief. We will continue to support the development of United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura's proposals for a freeze in Aleppo to reduce the violence.

We welcome the recent election of Syrian National Coalition President Khaled Khoja and encourage him to maximize the opportunity presented by the Egyptian-sponsored meetings later this month, to further unite the Syrian opposition to speak with one voice against

the twin evils of the tyranny of the Al-Assad regime and extremism.

New energy is needed on the political track. The Moscow conference can be an element of that, but if it is to be successful we will need a broader initiative with United Nations backing and Security Council engagement. We encourage Russia to use its influence with the regime to help bring that about. This must be the year in which a political process brings an end to the Syrian conflict.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes the Chilean presidency's convening of today's open debate on the Middle East. I thank Assistant Secretary-General ad interim Toyberg-Frandzen for his briefing. China has also listened attentively to the statements made by the Ambassadors of Palestine and Israel.

Today's meeting is the Council's first debate on the Middle East in the year 2015. The past year marked the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, as established by the United Nations. Sadly, 2014 witnessed severe difficulties in the peace process in the Middle East, with the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks stalled and the conflict in the Gaza Strip. Palestine and Israel were once again beset by tension and confrontation. The Security Council was still not able to take substantive measures on the subject of Palestine, and was not able to adopt the draft resolution on the question of Palestine proposed by Jordan on behalf of the Arab States. China expresses its profound regret in that regard.

The history of the Middle East peace process has repeatedly proved that conducting peace talks is like sailing upstream — if they do not move forward, they will fall back. The stalled peace talks will inevitably bring about intensified conflicts and bring both Palestine and Israel into the vicious cycle of violence begetting violence. China hopes that Palestine and Israel will consolidate their confidence in peace, remain committed to the strategic option of peace talks and take measures to rebuild mutual trust.

We call upon Israel to stop building settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, stop dismantling Palestinian housing, completely lift its blockade against the Gaza Strip and transfer to Palestine the tax revenue that has been withheld so as to create the conditions necessary for relaunching the peace talks. We support Palestine's bid to join the United Nations and other international organizations and its efforts to strengthen its internal solidarity.

Meanwhile, Israel's legitimate security concerns should also be addressed. China hopes that Palestine and Israel will meet each other halfway and resume negotiations as soon as possible so as to promote an early and proper settlement of the question of Palestine. The question of Palestine is the core of the question of the Middle East and is interwoven and closely related with other hotspot issues in the Middle East. The protracted absence of a settlement of the question of Palestine will lead to more violence and extremism in the region and will make the regional hotspot issues more complicated and difficult.

The international community must have a sense of urgency when it comes to the question of Palestine, strengthen coordination, explore all possibilities and develop synergies so as to bring Palestine and Israel back to the right track of peace talks. The Security Council should respond as soon as possible to the call of Palestine, the Arab States and the international community by effectively shouldering its responsibilities and playing an effective role in promoting peace talks, ending the occupation and promoting the rebuilding of Gaza, and take action to promote progress on the question of Palestine.

China has been a firm supporter and sincere mediator of the peace process between Palestine and Israel. We support the endeavour of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State of Palestine on the basis of the 1967 borders, with full sovereignty and with East Jerusalem as its capital. We support Palestine and Israel's enjoyment of common peace and security. China has been promoting, through its means, peace talks among the parties concerned. China is in favour of all international efforts that are conducive to the peace process. China is ready to enhance its cooperation with the international community so as to play a greater role in pushing for a settlement of the question of Palestine.

The Syrian crisis will soon enter its fifth year. Protracted warfare has plunged the Syrian people into misery and suffering, and has severely threatened regional and international peace and stability. Promoting a political settlement through dialogue and negotiations among the parties in Syria is the only way to achieve peace and stability in Syria.

Recently, the international community has made a series of efforts towards a political settlement to the

Syrian crisis. Special Envoy of the Secretary-General De Mistura has been conducting shuttle diplomacy with the goal of establishing freeze zones. Russia has invited the Syrian Government and the opposition to hold a dialogue in Moscow at the end of the month. China welcomes those initiatives. We are in favour of all efforts conducive to resolving the conflict in Syria, enhancing mutual trust, alleviating people's suffering and promoting a political settlement. We hope that all the parties in Syria will act in the interests of the entire nation and its people, actively cooperate with the international mediation efforts, achieve as soon as possible a political settlement that responds to the circumstances in the country and addresses the interests of all parties concerned, so as to give peace a chance and bring tranquility to the Syrian people.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Sir, for presiding over this meeting. I also thank the Assistant Secretary-General for his briefing.

I align myself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union.

Spain joined the Security Council on 1 January 2015. That very day, its representative, the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, was in Egypt. Two weeks later, and in preparation for today's debate, Minister Margallo visited Israel, Palestine and Jordan. I believe that constitutes the best proof of the fact that Spain will devote special attention to the situation in the Middle East.

We are speaking today of a region in which, after six decades, violence still has unforeseen ramifications, with consequences for global security. The ultimate expression of that is the emergence of terrorism under the banner of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains st the heart of all the regional crises. After more than half a century, there is still no glimmer of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution that would channel the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to establish their own State and guarantee the right of Israel to live in peace and security with its neighbours in the region.

Given that overview, I would now state that Spain has shown interest in listening to the parties and offering its good offices to create a framework within which to return to political negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. There is no alternative to that. Everyone knows the extremely delicate and fragile nature of the current situation. When what is most needed is an understanding between the parties, there seems to be a perverse trend towards progressive detachment from and break with the internationally accepted principles and parameters as the framework for a final solution.

In that regard, Minister García Margallo has conveyed clear and firm messages to both his Israeli and Palestinian interlocutors on the importance of remedying the situation, acting responsibly to defuse tension and adopting a constructive approach to restoring confidence, which has been entirely destroyed. Spain has demonstrated its belief that any unilateral act will distance us from the promised peace we all want.

In Israel, the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs conveyed to his partners our conviction that the settlement policy in the West Bank and Jerusalem is illegal under international law and remains the main obstacle to the two-State solution, which has been accepted by both parties since the Madrid Peace Conference of 1991. Furthermore, an eventual litigation of the conflict would not help to build the confidence needed to revitalize the peace process. Accordingly, the Spanish Minister has conveyed to the Palestinian leaders the urgency of curtailing any further step regarding the International Criminal Court, including any request to the Prosecutor to start investigations.

Minister Margallo has conveyed to all his interlocutors Spain's belief that the Security Council can and should combine its forces and work to overcome this dangerous impasse. Spain has not given up on the option of a draft resolution based on the parameters recognized by the international community and that establishes a clear and precise timetable for the parties' return to the negotiating table or the holding of an international conference, if that is the format adopted. The goal is not to substitute a draft resolution for the negotiations, but to use such a resolution to unblock the current situation and bring Israel and Palestine back to the negotiating table.

To achieve that, the draft resolution must be negotiated in such a way as to achieve the consensus of all Council members and must be presented at the most politically opportune time. That is the only way the draft resolution will be a constructive element for the peace process. Spain wants a draft resolution that is more effective than gimmicky and that will enjoy the broadest agreement, and is fully prepared to work for it with the members of the Council, all relevant stakeholders and, of course, the European Union, as well as the League of Arab States, which is holding

a meeting today to assess possible initiatives, and the Quartet, which will meet on 26 January.

The Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs has verified the degree of destruction caused by the recent conflict in Gaza. Although it has managed to launch the reconstruction mechanism to ensure that necessary materials reach Gaza, the process has been slow and is frustrating the expectations and needs of the population. We need at least to double the daily entry of material and to use the potential of the border crossings, beyond the mere introduction of building material, by seeking to ease the blockade, allowing the transit of Palestinian labour, exporting Palestinian products, and estabishing maritime communication routes that give Gaza access to the wider world. Moreover, it is indispensable that all funds pledged by various donors be delivered punctually. It is essential to consolidate the ceasefire agreed in Cairo. Resolution 1860 (2009) must be implemented in all its aspects.

The international community must support the reconciliation efforts between Fatah and Hamas and the formation of a Government of National Consensus under the authority of President Abbas. The success of the Government of National Consensus will unavoidably require the prompt return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza — a condition necessary to both the construction of a Palestinian State and to advancing the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and improving the daily lives of its inhabitants. The growing despair of the people of Gaza could give wings to the more radical options, including such groups as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), condemning it to further disaster. The perpetuation of this chaotic situation also threatens the security of the popuation of southern Israel.

Time is running out. The Security Council must be prepared to act responsibly and effectively. We appeal to the leaders of Israel and Palestine to show the courage to build the peace that their people need and crave. We applaud their decision to walk together in the march against terrorism in Paris. That same decision should impel them to negotiate a just and lasting peace.

Spain has made significant political gestures consistent with its position of support for the creation of a Palestinian State within the framework of a comprehensive solution to the peace process in the Middle East. Spain believes that the recognition of a Palestinian State, far from being an end in itself, must be a political act designed to achieve the coexistence of two States, Israel and Palestine, living in peace, prosperity and security. That is the meaning of the motion, supported by all parliamentary groups, approved by the Spanish Parliament in December.

The international community must end the conflict in Syria, which has claimed more than 200,000 victims since 2011 and generated a massive outflow of displaced persons and refugees. The plan of action of the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. De Mistura, takes new dynamics into account in addressing the Syrian conflict. Ensuring that all parties allow the freezing of hostilities in Aleppo would represent a promising step towards alleviating the humanitarian tragedy. The United Nations is called on to play a key role in implementing it. It will be vital to monitor compliance with the principles accepted by the parties in order to prevent the recurrence, as has happened in the past, unwanted situations that ended up generating further suffering.

The Syrian conflict will come to an end once and for all only with a political negotiation involving all parties. This will entail a wide range of actors negotiating to avoid the collapse and a subsequent institutional vacuum in Syria. There can be no doubt that the principles of the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex) should guide a possible negotiation framework. In this sense, Spain will continue to promote dialogue between the Syrian opposition forces and other factions of the moderate opposition, and offer its good offices to the Special Envoy of the United Nations, based on the experience of the so-called Córdoba group. Launched in January 2014, this process has promoted rapprochement between the moderate opposition groups belonging to Syrian minority communities — Kurdish, Yezidi, Assyrian and Syriac Christians and Druze — and in the coming weeks, Alawites. Spain thinks the process Córdoba is a valuable experience ahead of a wider political process, and seeks to play a part therein.

The humanitarian crisis is having a strong impact not only in Syria and Iraq, but in the neighbouring countries of Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan and Turkey. During its two years as a member of the Security Council, Spain wishes to embded itself deeply in the Syrian dossier. The Council has adopted several resolutions aimed at mitigating the very grave humanitarian crisis. We have identified a number of humanitarian and protection challenges, all of which remain active and, in many cases, unanswered.

It is essential to safeguard Lebanon from being contiminated by the Syrian conflict. Lebanon is already host to a number of refugees, straining the absorption capacity of a country of its size and sensitive and complex social balance. We must help to alleviate this problem and further support the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. We must ensure compliance with resolution 1701 (2006) and keep working to strengthen the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces to maintain the territorial integrity, rule of law, independence and sovereignty of Lebanon . We must also pay special attention to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force in the Golan Heights, which is currently one of the most vulnerable missions and therefore requires more support.

The Security Council has a crucial role to play in combating terrorism and its political legitimization. Jihadist terrorism in all its forms is one of the greatest threats to international peace and security. No one is free from the threat. It is the right and duty of the international community to defend itself. We must act together and with determination. We are all necessary. Especially important in that respect are the predominantly Muslim countries, which are the main victims of the barbarians designs of jihadist terror.

Resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014) have drawn clear lines of action. It behooves us to ensure their implementation and development. The strategy to combat ISIL, which includes more than 60 countries and in which Spain participates with a contingent of 300 military advisers, is bearing fruit on the ground and has reduced the terrorists' capacity for action.

In the case of Iraq, we will give full support to the inclusive Government of Mr. Al-Abadi in its fight against terrorism and in maintaining the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the country. The people and Government of Iraq and the international community can rely on the full readiness and experience of Spain in the service of this just cause.

The complexity of the region complicates international coordination and highlights the need to create, through diplomacy, mechanisms to address structural conflicts in the Middle East, with the participation of the key countries of the region and Arab regional organizations such as the League of Arab States and the Gulf Cooperation Council. The entire international community, particularly neighbouring countries with the capacity to influence, must join in this common endeavour. The recent tragic terrorist attacks by jihadist fanatics around the world remind us that it is time to build bridges to enable the international community to defeat terrorism in the realm of ideas aw well. The growing terrorist threat makes the achievement of a just and lasting peace between Palestine and Israel even more urgent. Spain can be relied upon to play its part on the road to peace.

Mrs. Jakubonė (Lithuania): Let me start by welcoming you, Sir, as President of the Security Council. I thank Assistant Secretary-General ad interim Toyberg-Frandzen for his briefing.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be made on behalf of the European Union (EU).

Before I turn to the situation in the region, allow me to express my delegation's sincere condolences to all those affected by last week's terrorist attack in France. Sunday's unprecedented massive rally in Paris in response to the massacre serves as a powerful reminder to the world that tolerance, freedom of expression, and respect for diversity are at the very core of our humanity.

As once again underlined in the Security Council's statement on the terrorist attack in Tripoli on 10 January, terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security. There is no, and there can never be, any justification for such acts, wherever and whenever and by whomsoever committed.

In Iraq, determined efforts have helped to halt the deadly advances of Daesh. To sustain those efforts, we also need to redouble our efforts in exposing Daesh and other terrorist groups for what they are, in all of their brutality, as sheer monsters and merciless killers who have no faith, no religion, no humanity. We must also step up the whole range of counter-terrorism measures and enhance international cooperation to that effect.

Furthermore, profound and sustainable changes within the country are paramount, with a legitimate and inclusive Government providing security for, and engaging with, all of Iraq's citizens. In that respect, we welcome the steps taken by Prime Minister Al Abadi. The 2 December oil deal between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Iraqi Government is a positive development that provides hope that the Iraqi Government is on the right track in pursuing its commitment to national reconciliation and inclusiveness. Those steps need to be matched by similar outreach to the Sunni community. International and

regional partners need to provide support to the Iraqi Government for capacity-building and reconstruction, so as to give Prime Minister Al Abadi the space to deliver his reform programme.

At the beginning of 2015, Syria remains the greatest humanitarian tragedy of the modern world. Human suffering in Syria has reached levels beyond imagination. More than 12 million Syrians are in urgent need of humanitarian aid, among them 5.6 million children. Horrendous atrocities and crimes against humanity have been recorded in detail in the reports of the Independent Commission of Inquiry, the "Caesar" report (S/2014/244, annex) and elsewhere.

Doctors, medical staff and humanitarian aid workers have been attacked and killed for their selfless efforts to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. The Government of Syria, which has the primary responsibility to protect, for four years has continued to perpetrate crimes against its own people. We fully support Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura in his efforts to find ways to reverse this horrific spiral of violence and move towards an inclusive political solution. We also urge all the parties, in particular the Syrian regime, to fully implement resolutions 2139 (2013) and 2191 (2014).

Impunity in Syria has lasted for much too long. The Council must step up the pressure in the face of continued non-compliance. The perpetrators of mass atrocities and crimes against humanity, whoever they are, must be brought to account. Justice and accountability are essential for the resolution of the crisis in Syria.

There is a tremendous lack of trust, interest and support by both sides for the efforts aimed at solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In that extremely unstable and explosive context, the status quo is unacceptable. All unilateral actions, inter alia joining international organizations and the halt of the transfer of tax revenues, are obstacles to the resumption of negotiations. The Israeli Government transfers of tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority should be timely and transparent, as required under the Paris Protocol.

The Palestinian leadership should use its international status constructively. Furthermore, continuous settlement expansion, settler violence, house demolitions, inflammatory statements by Hamas, and incitement must stop immediately in order to preserve the viability of a two-State solution.

In Gaza, life remains a human tragedy. Lithuania reiterates the importance of a fundamental change of the political, security and economic situation in the Gaza Strip, including the end of the closure. We urge the parties to fully implement the temporary mechanism for the monitoring and verification of reconstruction materials negotiated by the United Nations, Israel and the Palestinian Authority, as an important step towards the necessary urgent opening of all crossing points.

We would like to stress the importance of a change in Israeli policy to allow Gaza to trade normally and on a permanent basis.

The assumption of full Government functions by the Palestinian Authority is critical for a lasting improvement of the situation in Gaza. In order to advance the reconstruction of Gaza, it is paramount that the international community honour its financial commitments.

The unsustainable situation in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem and the deteriorating regional context underline the urgency of a comprehensive peace agreement. We call on all the parties and all the major stakeholders, including the United States, the Quartet, the League of Arab State, regional actors, the Security Council, the EU and others, to take the necessary steps to that end. The participation of both Palestinian President Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu at the solidarity rally in Paris demonstrates that Palestinians and Israelis stand for the same universal values — peace, tolerance and mutual respect. Let us hope that those shared values will bring Israelis and Palestinians back to the negotiating table, the sooner the better.

Mr. Gaspar Martins (Angola): Allow me again to express my great satisfaction, Sir, at seeing you presiding over a meeting of the Security Council. I also thank Mr. Toyberg-Frandzen for his very interesting and comprehensive briefing to the Council this morning.

I would like to start by clearly stating our position on this situation. Angola maintains good relations with the State of Israel, as well as with the Palestinian authorities. Our relations with Israel are based on the universal principles of international law and the mutual interests of both sides. Rather fruitful cooperation with Israel has evolved over the years in several sectors, in particular in agriculture, health, aviation, construction, fishing and telecommunication, among others. Likewise, Angola has very friendly historical

relations with Palestine. For a long time, we hosted the diplomatic representation of Palestine in our capital. Those relations reflect Angola's solidarity with the Palestinian people in their quest to fulfil their legitimate national aspirations to self-determination in a free and independent State.

We strongly believe that the peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would be a far-reaching step for the achievement of stability in the whole of the Middle East. Being fully aware of the complexities of the issue, we are of the view that a two-State solution is the only viable option for comprehensive peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians, for which both sides need to make significant compromises. We furthermore believe that there should be an end to the occupation of the Palestinian territories, so as to allow the Palestinian people to exercise their full right to self-determination towards peace and sustainable development.

At this point, we would like to address of Israel's ongoing settlement activity. We all agree that it has been consistently stated by the international community that settlement activity constitutes a violation of international law, that it is counterproductive for a two-State solution and that it serves as incitement to violence, as reflected in the recent events in Jerusalem. We hereby appeal to the Government of Israel to consider a new policy approach as a demonstration of its willingness to compromise and cooperate constructively with a view to attaining a peaceful settlement.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza is especially worrying. Although a temporary Gaza reconstruction mechanism is in place, urgent funding is required to rebuild critical services, including important electricity and water supply infrastructure. In this connection, we are pleased that the international community has pledged $5.4 billion for the reconstruction of Gaza, and commend Egypt and Norway for spearheading that effort, which is urgently needed to improve the living conditions of the Palestinians and to see fundamental changes in the dynamics of the conflict.

It is also crucial that the Palestinians unite in an effective governing structure, and we are pleased to note the critical steps that have been taken recently to create a unity Government. The Government of National Consensus needs to be consolidated and assume its responsibilities for the effective management of security and public services and become a viable counterpart in effective, result-oriented negotiations with Israel. The two-State solution cannot and should not continue to be a mere refrain. It has to be clear and objective, with an aim reachable through positive and productive negotiations.

Indeed, the political situation in the Middle East is extremely worrying. Continued conflict in Syria and its appalling humanitarian consequences, persistent instability in Iraq and its exacerbation of ethnic and religious divisions, and the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza need to be forcefully addressed by the Security Council. There are factors that have been feeding the rise of extremism, with radical groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and the Al-Nusra Front in the Middle East, as well as Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab in Africa, spreading a message of intolerance and hatred in the name of religion. The challenges in dealing with these trends are immense, and we must all join forces to find appropriate solutions through dialogue among civilizations and respect for cultures.

I would like to conclude by reiterating that we strive to contribute to the establishment of a forum for dialogue and productive discussion. At the recent march in Paris, we saw various world leaders, in particular President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu, marching together for the same objective of combatting terrorism and achieving peace. That was a ray of hope that we hope to preserve. We deeply hope that the international community will continue to help efforts to reach a peace settlement between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, easing tensions in the entire region and contributing meaningfully to a world of peace and security.

Mr. Laro (Nigeria): I too thank Assistant Secretary-General ad interim Toyberg-Frandzen for his briefing.

Nigeria remains convinced that a negotiated settlement represents the most viable path to lasting peace between Israel and Palestine. That is why we are concerned by the lack of progress in the peace process. There is a need for both parties to show flexibility and the political will to negotiate in good faith. Nigeria believes that the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles of land for peace, the road map for peace in the Middle East and the Arab Peace Initiative all form a valid basis for the attainment of lasting peace between Israel and Palestine.

What is required now, in our view, is for the leadership on both sides to take the courageous decisions that would allow the peace process to move

forward. Peace cannot be imposed from the outside. It has to come from within. We urge both sides to avoid the unilateral action and hostile rhetoric that deepen mistrust between them and push back the prospects for resumption of peace talks. There is no alternative to a negotiated solution. We wish to make it abundantly clear that Nigeria would like to see the Israeli-Palestinian issue resolved within the framework of a two-State solution that would allow both Israel and Palestine to live side by side in peace and security.

Mrs. Kawar (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): As we meet here, there are millions of displaced persons and refugees across the Middle East, in particular children, who have spent the past few weeks in the bitter cold under heavy rain and snow. The international community must respond to calls to address the causes that led to their displacement, whether in Palestine, Syria or Iraq. In the meantime, the international community must enhance humanitarian assistance to refugees and help host countries, particularly Jordan, in this humanitarian mission, which we undertake on behalf of humanity and the international community.

I should also like to express our appreciation to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for their efforts to alleviate the effects of the difficult weather conditions on refugee communities in the Middle East. I also want to thank those Governments that have helped by providing necessary support, which, although greatly appreciated, is far less than what is required.

Last year was one of the toughest and harshest years for the Palestinian people in the occupied territories. Their sincere aspirations for peace were struck down by the halt of peace negotiations at the end of March, despite the appreciated and unprecedented efforts of United States Secretary of State John Kerry. That halt in negotiations was followed by political tension, as well as a vacuum that led to deadly violent confrontations in various parts of the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly the Gaza Strip. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2014 witnessed the greatest number of casualties among Palestinians since 1967, largely due to the unjustifiable Israeli aggression in the Gaza Strip. More than 2,000 Palestinians — mostly civilians, in particular women and children — were killed. Infrastructure, such as health and education services and facilities, was destroyed. Half a million Palestinians were displaced in 2014, and 22,000 Palestinian homes were either destroyed or rendered uninhabitable.

Last year saw settlement expansion and the forced displacement of Palestinians. In 2014, the Israeli Government continued to announce the construction of new housing units in disregard of repeated condemnations by the international community. The number of settlers in the West Bank increased by 4 per cent over the previous year, according to figures from the Israeli Government itself. The number of Palestinians displaced in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, also increased by 6 per cent in 2014 as a result of the forced displacement of Palestinians and the policies of occupation. Even the Al-Aqsa Mosque suffered last year, with two unprecedented incidents — the first being its closure and the second the storming of the site — not to mention a series of attacks by Jewish settlers and extremists on Al-Haram Al-Sharif and provocative visits by members of the Israeli right and the Knesset, all in disregard of the feelings of millions of Muslims around the world.

Jordan — based on the Hashemite guardianship and custody of the Islamic and Christian Holy Sites in East Jerusalem assumed directly by His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein — will continue to stand against all Israeli violations and incursions into the Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Jordanian efforts under the leadership of His Majesty the King succeeded in providing relatively better access to worshippers and increasing their numbers as compared to previous months.

By the end of last year, both Palestinian and Israeli parties moved in two different directions. Israel chose to continue its settlement policies and to enact laws that threatened the two-State solution. The Palestinian leadership, for its part, chose to resort to this international organization in pursuit of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to live in freedom and dignity in their own independent State. Today I will not warn again of the consequences of continuing with the status quo. We have all witnessed episodes of violence and tension, to which I have already referred to and which will be repeated even more gravely, with wider ramifications, if the international community fails to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

What I do want to repeat and emphasize today is the urgent need to work this year to urge the two sides to build on the efforts made by United States Secretary

of State John Kerry, and engage in negotiation through a serious framework in which all unilateral measures come to an end. Such negotiations have to lead to the enactment of a two-State solution within a reasonable period, and an end to the conflict through resolving all core issues — Jerusalem, refugees, security, borders and water issues — in accordance with international terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative in all its elements, one that meets and fully protects Jordan's vital interests associated with each of those issues. Jordan is directly involved in all those issues. The success of such endeavours requires a genuine, actual Israeli movement in this direction. It requires that Israel show seriousness and commitment to peace and the two-State solution through action, work and halting all violations, attacks and unilateral measures that are already illegal, and engaging in good faith in serious negotiations.

The situation in the Middle East, including the deadly events of last year, took up 23.8 per cent of the meetings and consultations of thr Security Council, despite the fact that the Council in 2014 adopted only one official document on the Isreaeli-Palestinian conflict, namely, presidential statement S/PRST/2014/13, which Jordan submitted and which called for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip on the eve of Eid Al-Fitr. As a matter of fact, the Security Council has not adopted any resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since 2009, despite the historic record of resolutions that the Council was able to adopt over the past decades — resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and many others — that form the international terms of reference and legitimacy considered as the basis for the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Such facts must prompt us to conduct a genuine review of the required role of the Security Council this year vis-à-vis finding a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They also prompt us to work together unanimously and consensually in coordinated fashion, within a framework that supports direct negotiations in the Council, to develop a frame of reference for such negotiations, end the occupation and establish an independent, fully sovereign and viable Palestinian State on the June 1967 border with East Jerusalem as its capital, in the framework of a two-State solution, living in peace and security side by side with Israel and all countries and peoples of the region.

One of the prominent reasons that lead to extremism is the failure to find a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian cause, which Jordan, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah, considers the core of the conflict in the region. We in Jordan are at the forefront of regional and international efforts to combat terrorism and extremism and their supporters, particularly through initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue among religions and cultures, and explaining the true concepts of Islam, the religion and its message of tolerance — such as the Amman Message, Common Word and the World Interfaith Harmony Week. Jordan will spare no efforts in working to combat terrorism with other States by all legitimate and legal means through the mechanisms of joint international action. What we are doing to achieve this goal reflects the complex danger of terrorism, which also requires that we confront it militarily, on the security front and ideologically, as well as emphasizing the fact that terrorism has no religion or race. Moreover, linking terrorism with any religion, race or region, intentionally or unintentionally, is the very best way to give publicity to extremists, terrorists and the enemies of humankind, including their deviant thoughts.

Jordan stresses the need for a political solution to the crisis in Syria that ends bloodshed and achieves a political transition, in line with the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. It must be a political solution that restores security and stability to Syria and its people, rebuilds Syrian national, including among all components of the Syrian people, and provides for the return of refugees to their homes. The absence of a comprehensive solution to the Syrian crisis will ignite sectarian conflict in the region. Jordan, as a country hosting more than 1.5 million Syrians is exhausted. It has exceeded its limits in providing assistance to Syrian refugees, particularly in the light of our limited resources and inadequate international support. We appeal today to the international community, now more than ever, to shoulder its responsibilities in supporting Jordan and other host countries to enable them to continue to perform this important humanitarian role.

In conclusion, let us work together to make 2015 the year of achieving peace and security in the Middle East. The peoples of our region are eager to do so.

Mr. Haniff (Malaysia): I wish to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chile for convening and presiding over this open debate. I also wish to also thank Assistant Secretary-General ad interim Toyberg-Frandzen for his briefing.

We just left behind the year 2014, which the United Nations declared as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The international community believed and hoped that 2014 would be a critical year for Israeli-Palestinian peace and that it could further promote solidarity with the Palestinian people and generate further momentum and international support for the realization of their inalienable rights, denied for too long.

Malaysia regrets the fact that the year 2014 ended with yet another disappointing and crushing blow to the Palestinian people and their aspirations, as the window of opportunity once again slammed shut on their dreams of self-determination. The peace talks brokered by the United States stalled, another war broke out in Gaza, with catastrophic consequences, and the Security Council failed to adopt a draft resolution (S/2014/916) aimed at setting a deadline for ending the Israeli occupation. The year also marked the tenth anniversary of the International Court of Justice's 2004 advisory opinion on Israel's construction of a wall in the occupied Palestinian Territory, an opinion that for the past 10 years has unfortunately been completely ignored and remains unimplemented.

Malaysia wishes to reiterate and reaffirm its long-standing support for a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, based on a two-State solution and the legitimate right to self-determination of the Palestinian people in an independent State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel, based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We remain committed to the implementation of internationally recognized initiatives such as the Arab Peace Initiative, the Oslo Accords, the Quartet road map, the Madrid terms of reference and the relevant Security Council resolutions. We commend the diplomatic efforts of the United States to try to revive the peace talks. However, little progress has been made with their resumption, while the conditions on the ground worsen and move further and further away from a two-State solution, owing to increasing illegal Israeli settlements and the continuing construction of a wall of separation in the occupied Palestinian territory, among other actions.

Faced as we are with more than 60 years of failure to resolve the conflict, the current deadlock in negotiations and the increasingly unlikely future of a two-State solution, Malaysia no longer sees the wisdom in insisting that the only possible route to resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is through bilateral negotiations, a position that serves only to perpetuate the status quo. Let us not forget that the State of Israel was created by the United Nations following a General Assembly vote in 1947 (resolution 181 (II)). The State of Israel did not come into being through bilateral negotiations with its neighbours, and yet we deny a similar path to Palestine and criticize any attempt by Palestine to seek fulfilment at the United Nations of its right to self-determination as unilateral action. Considering the prolonged deadlock in efforts to resolve the conflict through bilateral negotiations, the Security Council should step in and shoulder its responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations to address the situation, which constitutes a threat to international peace and security that extends beyond the region's boundaries.

As the Council is aware, earlier this month Palestine acceded to various international conventions and treaties on issues such as cluster munitions, the law of the sea, the International Criminal Court and transnational organized crime. Such moves should not be seen as undermining or jeopardizing the peace talks. The international community should rather welcome them as a step in the right direction. In Malaysia's view, in acceding to such international conventions and treaties, Palestine's actions will be constrained by and evaluated against internationally agreed norms and standards. Such actions will also help to deter the commission of war crimes and to end impunity for the parties on both sides of the conflict. They definitely represent a preferable and more legitimate path to achieving the legitimate right to self-determination than that of resorting to violence and extremism. It is thus in everyone's interest to embrace Palestine as a responsible member of the international community, bound by the rules and norms of international law.

We commend France's effort towards the end of 2014 in taking an initiative to try to bridge the gaps between Council members on the issue of Palestine. The parameters for the peace agreement proposed by France and subsequently taken up by Palestine provide a good basis for further negotiations. They demonstrate that a Security Council resolution on Palestine, despite allergic reactions from certain parties, is not necessarily incompatible with peace talks. Instead, the parameters and time frame could provide much-needed pressure on both sides to return to the negotiating table in order to arrive at a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful settlement to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Malaysia wishes to see peace talks and negotiations between

Palestine and Israel continue. We repeat our call on the international community, and the Security Council in particular, to shoulder its responsibilities under the Charter to resolve the conflict and act as honest brokers to the conflicting parties in order to ensure long-term peace, security and stability in the region. However, negotiations should not take forever and should be carried out within a reasonable time frame.

Moving on to Syria, Malaysia strongly supports all efforts to find a diplomatic and peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis through dialogue and negotiations, especially through the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura. We will continue to support a comprehensive political settlement of the Syrian crisis based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). We note that there will be a meeting of the parties in the very near future and look forward to being apprised of developments by the Special Envoy.

Malaysia welcomes the progress made by the United Nations and the Organization for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on eliminating chemical weapons in Syria. However, we are gravely concerned about the use of chlorine for hostile purposes in Syria, as described in the reports of the OPCW's fact-finding mission. We also remain deeply concerned about the massive and deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria. We urge all parties in Syria to respect international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and to implement the various Council decisions and resolutions on humanitarian access. As Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, Malaysia is concerned about the scale, scope and gravity of violations committed against children in Syria. We strongly condemn the widespread incidence of grave violations against children and call on all parties to protect and uphold the rights of all children in Syria. We also urge that the perpetrators of such heinous crimes be held accountable.

With regard to the occupied Syrian Golan, Malaysia reiterates its call for Israel's complete withdrawal from the area, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions, as well as international law and the Charter. We also call on Israel to cease its violations of Lebanese sovereignty and withdraw its troops from the occupied territories in Lebanon, in accordance with resolution 1701 (2006).

The Middle East has seen a deeply worrying surge in extremism and terrorism, including in Syria, Yemen, Lebanon and Iraq. It is no coincidence that extremism and terrorism have gained ground against a backdrop of prolonged political conflict and highly unstable socioeconomic situations in those countries. Malaysia condemns in the strongest terms the horrific atrocities committed by terrorist groups such as Daesh, which in no way represent the peaceful religion of Islam. We must not let extremism and terrorism gain the upper hand in the region.

For the past several years Malaysia has called for an international platform for the silent majority — that is, the voices of moderation — to enable them to come together to counter the growth of extremist sentiments in all their forms. That position is based on the belief that the real divide in the world today is not between East and West, developed and developing countries or Muslims and non-Muslims. The fault line lies rather between moderates and extremists of all religions and beliefs, and in all areas and aspects. The disturbing developments in the world today, and in the Middle East in particular, reflect the urgent need for a comprehensive approach to countering extremism and terrorism, including by addressing the underlying contributing factors, and not through the use of force alone. The voices of moderation must prevail against those who espouse hate, ignorance, violence and extremism. We must summon the political will required to bridge differences and restore stability to the lives of all the peoples of the Middle East, regardless of religion, ethnicity or nationality.

In conclusion, Malaysia sincerely hopes to be able to play a constructive role in the Security Council in maintaining international peace and security, particularly in the Middle East. We look forward to contributing to the maintenance of international peace and security and to upholding the Charter of the United Nations, including through our long-held value of moderation as a useful tool to counter extremism, reconcile differences and resolve disputes.

As Malaysia takes its seat on the Security Council, I wish to reaffirm my delegation's readiness to cooperate and engage constructively with all interested partners and stakeholders on all issues before the Council, including the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, I wish to welcome you, Sir, as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chile to preside over the Security Council today. As this is the first time I have taken the floor in the Council this year, I would

also like to welcome all new non-permanent members of the Council and to express our hope that there will be close and constructive cooperation with them in the period before us.

The situation in the Palestinian track of the Middle East settlement remains among the major contentious items on the international agenda. It has already been almost a year since Palestinians and Israelis broke off negotiations, and the alienation between them only continues to grow.

Against this background, the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate. The situation in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, remains tense, frequently teetering on the edge of open, armed confrontation. The ongoing settlement activities of Israel in the occupied territories play a considerable role in this. There are further pending issues relating to normalization around the Gaza Strip in the wake of the bloody conflict that took place in the summer of 2014.

In such conditions, any opportunity must be seized to rekindle the peace process. Guided by that kind of logic, Russia supported the draft resolution (S/2014/916) proposed by Jordan in December, which, unfortunately, was not adopted, although it did not contradict the existing international consensus on the Palestinian-Israeli settlement. On the contrary, it referred to the fundamental principles of the peace process, including confirmation of the relevant resolutions of the Council.

In our view, the developments on the Palestinian track are being transformed before our very eyes into a dangerous chain reaction, when any step by one of the parties automatically triggers counter-actions by the other side. The resulting spiral exacerbates the negative backdrop of relations between Palestinians and Israelis.

In this kind of climate, the task of remedying the situation in the peace process would appear to be a highly complex one. But this is one of those challenges where, if we fail to respond in a timely and appropriate manner, we risk worsening the situation with respect to the Palestinian issue and the situation in the Middle East in general.

The complexities of the task of rekindling the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations mean that the international community needs to step up its efforts to revive the talks. We believe that the best mechanism for this is the Middle East Quartet of international mediators, whose work, above all at the ministerial level, should be promptly reinvigorated. Close involvement of the Security Council in the Middle East peace process must be an important element in international support for the Palestinian-Israeli contacts. Discussions alone, even on a monthly basis, are, of course, not enough.

The excessively protracted Syrian conflict is having an extremely negative impact on the situation in the Middle East. It is quite clear that relying on the military option to overthrow the regime has not been justified. Those who would follow such an approach have only worsened the plight of the Syrian people. We would like to emphasize once again that the only way to end the conflict is through dialogue. In order to truly launch a process of national reconciliation, all opportunities must be made use of.

Intra-Syrian consultations are planned from 26 to 29 January in Moscow. This is a practical contribution by Russia to international efforts to assist in advancing the peace process in Syria. The purpose of these meetings is to lay the groundwork for launching, without preconditions, an inclusive dialogue among Syrians based on the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012.

We do not view the Moscow event as a one-off. It must have specific applicable results. We realize that the Syrian crisis also has international and regional dimensions, meaning there is a critical need for a comprehensive settlement of the situation in and around Syria. We expect that our approach will meet with understanding and support from all external actors who have leverage with various segments of the Syrian opposition. Those who decide not to participate in this event will lose their standing in the whole negotiation process.

The Moscow gathering is a unique opportunity to start directs talks on an equal footing between the representatives of the Syrian Government and the opposition. To let this opportunity slip away would be an unforgivable mistake, as it is in the interest of a speedy end to the fratricidal conflict in Syria and of the consolidation of positive forces of Syrian society to counter international terrorism and violent extremism. We hope that our appeal will be heard by the Syrian sides, influential outside forces and regional players alike.

Mr. Suárez Moreno (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on presiding over this important debate on the Middle East, including the Palestinian

question — an issue of particular importance to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. I would also like to welcome Mr. Jens Anders Toyberg-Frandzen, Assistant Secretary-General ad interim for Political Affairs.

Our country endorses the statement to be delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. Nevertheless, I would like to set out our national position on the matter before us.

The fomenting of armed conflicts and the maintenance of colonial situations and foreign occupation in some areas of the world have a negative impact on international peace and security. We cannot remain indifferent to these facts and their gravity, especially when we recall that the Charter of the United Nations enshrines the commitment of Member States to safeguard future generations from the scourge of war.

The Venezuelan delegation reaffirms its full support for the right to self-determination, which entitles the nationals of the State of Palestine to live within internationally recognized borders, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. In this regard, we reiterate our repudiation of the illegal policies implemented by the occupying Power, Israel, which seek to deny the Palestinian people their rights, with the political-territorial disintegration of the State of Palestine as the goal.

Our country urges the immediate cessation of Israeli settlement construction in the occupied territories that are part of the sovereign and independent State of Palestine. Such Israeli practices flagrantly violate international law. Moreover, we condemn the Israeli occupying Power's withholding of tax revenue from the State of Palestine, in contravention of the agreements signed between both parties regarding the transfer of resources.

Israel is attempting to suffocate the State of Palestine by cutting it off from basic supplies, including economic income, food, medicine and other goods essential to residents' everyday lives and to the functioning of its political institutions, including the payment of salaries to public sector employees. Israel must refrain from implementing measures of collective punishment against the Palestinian people that worsen their appalling humanitarian conditions, in clear violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. At the same time, we deplore the fact that the blockade imposed by the occupying Power against the Palestinian population of Gaza since 2007 is still in force, which affects the human rights and worsens the already precarious living conditions of the inhabitants of that area. We demand that Israel immediately and definitively lift this brutal blockade.

The Israeli military occupation is the leading cause of the flagrant violation of the human rights of the Palestinian population and of international humanitarian law. Venezuela advocates the establishment of a timeline for bringing an end to this unsustainable and illegal occupation of territories belonging to the State of Palestine, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

In keeping with the Charter of the United Nations, our country encourages both parties to continue with negotiations in order to achieve a firm and lasting peace, whereby both States can safely coexist as sovereign and independent countries, within internationally recognized borders. A negotiated political solution to this matter is a decisive factor for peace and security in the Middle East. In addition, we welcome the accession of the State of Palestine to various international instruments, which confirms its irrevocable commitment to the cause of international peace and security, human rights, cooperation and development.

Lastly, we reiterate our unwavering support for the request of the State of Palestine to be admitted as a full Member of the United Nations. We hope the Security Council will fully assume the responsibilities bestowed upon it by the Charter, so that the General Assembly, under the recommendation of this principal organ, will be able to quickly decide on the matter.

Mr. Cherif (Chad) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to thank the Chilean presidency of the Security Council for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Let me also thank Mr. Jens Anders Toyberg-Frandzen, Assistant Secretary General ad interim for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

In order, I will address the Palestinian question, the situation in Syria and, lastly, the situation in Lebanon.

In a regional context that is deeply troubled and destabilized by a number of conflicts and tensions, the Palestinian question presents itself with even greater drama, especially since the peace process is currently deadlocked. Do we need to continue the pattern of

ongoing negotiations that produce no results, or do we need to explore other ways and means to find appropriate solutions to the crisis? The status quo has become increasingly untenable, both for Palestinians and for most of the international community. The international community as a whole, particularly the Security Council, needs to assume its responsibilities in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations in order to propose prospects for a viable peace, putting an end to the conflict, enabling Palestinians to have an independent sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just, appropriate settlement of the refugee issue, based on the General Assembly resolution 194 (III), of December 1948.

The ongoing failure to settle the Israeli-Palestinian question affects the credibility of the international system and poses increasingly serious threats to international peace and security. The Security Council's rejection of the draft resolution (S/2014/916), which in our consideration was reasonable, submitted on 30 December by Jordan on behalf of the Group of Arab States, included a deadline for the end of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories. That rejection should not undermine the initiative on which it was based. The initiative was supported by a majority of the international community and remains an alternative to the current stalemate. It is henceforth crucial for the Council to become even more involved, together with other international partners, as it explores avenues for solutions that could end the negotiation cycle that merely allows the occupation to continue and maintains the current situation. The Security Council needs to become further involved to salvage the solution of two States, living side by side, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, notably the exchange of land for peace, the road map, the previously established agreements between the parties and the Arab Peace Initiative. The two-State solution should not be challenged under any pretext, for it is fully in keeping with the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people and takes into account the security concerns of Israel.

With respect to Syria, we are deeply concerned by the increasingly violent actions that the conflict has assumed and the ongoing suffering of the Syrian people within and outside the country, especially during this period when there is a serious cold wave and snow enveloping the region, which has even led to several deaths, including those of women and children. We call on the international community to step up its efforts to provide considerable assistance to humanitarian agencies of the United Nations so that they can ease the plight of the Syrian people who are subject to cold, the horrors of war and difficulties in terms of the climate. We believe that it is time to act to find a solution to the Syrian crisis by focusing on a political solution. From that perspective, we support the proposal of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, aimed at ending hostilities in Aleppo, providing humanitarian assistance and opening a brief hiatus that would make it possible to create the conditions necessary for a political dialogue between the belligerents. We encourage them to pursue this with the stakeholders and countries of the region in order to work out a consensus on a strategy aimed at ending the crisis.

Lebanon continues to deal with numerous challenges and has been fully affected by humanitarian and security fallout from the Syrian crisis. More than 1 million refugees have entered Lebanon, which largely exceeds Lebanon's ability to host them. Lebanon has shown exemplary generosity in that regard. We call on the international community to work to help Lebanon deal with the tremendous burden and to deal with the collateral effects of the Syrian crisis. We urge the Lebanese leaders to continue dialogue and to reach the necessary compromises so that the election of the country's President will take place without further delay. Lebanese stakeholders need to deal with the current situation and overcome their own difficulties in order to avoid a constitutional vacuum that would further weaken the country and worsen its security situation.

Lastly, we firmly condemn the attack perpetrated by Jabhat Al-Nusra north of Tripoli on 10 January, which claimed several lives and caused many to be wounded. We express our solidarity with Lebanon in its fight against terrorist movements.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): This public debate is the first meeting of this nature of the Security Council since the terrorist attacks perpetrated in France last week. Allow me to say a few words on the subject.

On behalf of France, I would like say how overwhelmed and strengthened we were by the massive support that was shown to us from all around the world. On behalf of France, I would like to thank the United Nations for its exemplary support through the Security Council press statement issued on 7 January (SC/11727),

through the minute of silence observed by the Council and through the commitment of the Secretary-General, who came to provide his support to the French Mission to the United Nations here in New York, as well as the representatives of so many countries. All these were signs of exceptional solidarity.

On behalf of France, I would like to underscore the historic dimension of the march that took place in my country on 11 January. Four million citizens of all origins took to the streets of my country to combat terrorism and to defend the values that are at the very core of who we are. That was the largest demonstration since the liberation of France in 1944. Four million people were marching side by side, with a number of world leaders unprecedented for such a public march since the funeral of President Kennedy in Washington, half a century ago. It has been an extraordinary message of unity. The France that speaks today is standing tall, mobilized, with greater determination than ever. The march in Paris and all throughout France was the best response to terrorism.

France, which had been targeted for defeat, is still standing with its friends and its allies, in support of three principles. The first is the protection and defence of free expression and its corollary, freedom of the press, which does not champion either hatred or terrorism. The second is the affirmation of a response to terrorism that combines the greatest firmness, both beyond and within our borders, with strict respect for the fundamental rights, without which democracy is denied. Naturally that response does not target any religious community; it targets individuals who practice or defend violence. Of course France expresses solidarity with all countries affected by terrorism, such as, most recently, Nigeria. The third principle is tolerance, which comprises a resolute struggle against all forms of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, racism and all types of discrimination against people. We will not allow men, women or children to be attacked or killed in France because they are Jewish, as occurred last Friday at the kosher supermarket, or because they are Muslim or of any other religion, or atheist. France protects all of its citizens, without regard to belief or lack of belief.

The attacks have highlighted the extent to which, in an interdependent world, the security of each and every one is a common good. More than ever, peace and stability in the Middle East are inseparable from that of Europe. More than ever before, France is committed to the future of the Middle East.

Today, the Middle East is an area of major instability, marked by regional rivalries and the scourge of terrorism, with an immense human cost that is only partly reflected in the terribe number of dead, of refugees and of displaced persons. In order to restore durable peace and stability, we must maintain a single course, namely, provide a fair response to the legitimate aspirations of peoples and preserve the peaceful coexistence of peoples in a zone that has seen sectarianism gain ground. That is the meaning of the policy that France seeks to lead and which it is pursuing in all current crises. We will stay the course with strength and determination, whether it concerns the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iraq, Syria or Lebanon.

On 30 December, the Council suffered a new setback in the relaunching of the peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine (see S/PV.7354). Once again the Council was unable to unite to find consensus to move towards a two-State solution, which is the only solution capable of providing a just solution to the aspirations of the two peoples — for the Palestinians, the aspiration to a sovereign, independent State; for the Israelis, the guarantee of lasting security. Those two legitimate claims can be satisfied only if we move towards the solution that is known to all, on the basis of internationally recognized parameters.

As is well known, the current situation remains dangerous. The process is at an impasse. Gaza is growing poorer as Israel blocks the tax payments that are by law are due to the Palestinian Authority, and that threatens the stability of the area. We are doing all that we can to prevent an escalation. That would not be in anyone's interest.

In that context, France is determined to work towards changing the methodology of the peace process. We are convinced that without that, the two-State solution will remain wishful thinking. That collective effort must be based on an indisputable basis that the Security Council can and must offer through the adoption of a resolution on the parameters of the final status. France will continue its efforts towards a constructive, reasonable and consensual resolution, one allowing the Council to become an actor fully committed to peace. We continue to believe that an international mechanism in which the countries of the region have a role to play should help the parties to emerge from the impasse that has lasted far too long.

In Iraq, as in Syria, Daesh has thrived through lack of governance, and the repression and the marginalization

of the Sunni population. Our fight against Daesh must be carried out on all fronts — political and military, foreign terrorist combatants and financing — without ever losing sight of the fact that in Iraq and in Syria, any lasting solution must be political.

In Iraq, the military intervention of the international coalition aims to weaken the offensive capacity of Daesh and support the Iraqi forces on the ground. The international community must provide full support to Prime Minister Haider Al Abadi, who has committed himself with courage to the path of reconciliation and assembly. We must encourage him to continue his efforts on behalf of recovery and good governance.

In Syria we are facing a completely opposite situation. The regime of Bashar Al-Assad and its brutality and repressive measures have encouraged the development of Daesh. The fight against terrorism in Syria can never involve compromising with a regime that is responsible for 200,000 deaths. In Syria, half of the population has been forced to flee their homes. They should not have to choose between the scourges of terrorism and dictatorship. The fight against Daesh cannot be separated from a political transition that responds to the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people on the basis of the Geneva communiqué (resolution 2118 (2013), annex II).

The Security Council must remain fully mobilized in favour of the thorough and definitive dismantling of the Syrian chemical arsenal. The continued proven use of chlorine gas by the regime dmonostrates that the international community cannot have faith in the sincerity of the Syrian commitment towards the Chemical Weapons Convention. In the light of such violations, we cannot neglect the imperative to fight against impunity.

The situation in Lebanon remains extremely precarious, as we have seen once again with the terrorist attack in Tripoli on 10 January, which the Council has condemned. Those events show how much Lebanon has experienced the direct fallout from the crisis in Syria. We must do all that we can to ensure respect for the disassociation policy and the principles of the Baabda Declaration of 2012 (S/2012/477, annex). At the same time, we must encourage the Lebanese people to elect a President as soon as possible. The continuing vacancy of the position of Head of State deprives Lebanon — which is facing an influx of more than 1.2 million Syrian refugees into its territory — of the ability to respond effectively to the humanitarian, political, security and economic challenges it faces.

Mr. Barros Melet took the Chair.

France is aware of the seriousness of the situation in the Middle East. Now more than ever, it is determined to work as hard as necessary towards a resolution of the conflict that undermines the region. In the light of the terrorist threat, France reaffirms that it will maintain a clear course and fully assume its international responsibility.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the text in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber. I also appeal to speakers to deliver their statements at a normal speed to so that the Interpretation Service can carry out its work properly.

I wish to inform all those present that we will continue the open debate through the lunch hour, as a large number of speakers remains on the list.

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to welcome Angola, Malaysia, New Zealand, Spain and Venezuela.

I would like to focus on the heinous terrorist attacks that took place in Paris last week. I wish to pay a triple tribute, a Lebanese, Arab and Muslim tribute, to that glorious city, which has proven the extent to which it deserves its title as the capitol of freedom and of light. Muslims will recall that it was in Paris that the two pioneers of Islamic reform — the two great sheiks Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani and Mohammed Abduh — took refuge during their fight against oppression and colonization. It was from Paris that they published, in 1884, their famous journal, The Firmest Bond, in order to spread their thought on renewal. Arabs will also recall that it was in Paris that what has since been called the first Arab conference took place in 1913, because of the freedom and security that unique city offered to the conference's participants.

Lebanese, for their part, who were pioneers of the modern Arab renaissance, will also recall that the first Arabic newspaper, *Birgys-Barys*, was published from

Paris in 1859 by a Lebanese national, Rochaid Ed-Dahdah. How can we forget that the neighbourhoods, the streets, the squares and the universities of Paris throughout the past century have been the forum for meetings, protests and conferences that called for the granting of freedom to colonized people, including those colonized by France, in particular Algeria. How can we forget that Paris, over the past decades, has once again become a haven of peace for Arab politicians, writers and journalists, including Lebanese journalists, who went there in search of the freedom of expression and safety they did not find in their own countries. We once again pay tribute to Paris, city of lights, city of freedom.

There is no doubt that success in combating terrorist acts, the most recent of which took place in Paris, requires us to deal with their deep-rooted causes. Purely military or security measures, while essential and possibly inevitable, will alone not be enough to put an end to that threat, contrary to popular opinion. This is in no way a justification for terrorism, quite the contrary. It is the most certain — and possibly only — way to deal with the root causes of that scourge.

The reasons for terrorism are many, complex and overlapping. They include the frustration, alienation, humiliation and despair that arise from oppression, marginalization, poverty and persecution. They are the same feelings engendered in our own region by the continuing Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, with all that it entails in terms of ongoing oppression and shattered dreams. They are also due to the failure of all attempts at a settlement, one after another, including the most recent American efforts, which have all come up against the political intransigence of the Israeli authorities, who continue to build settlements, defying the resolutions of the Organization and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. All of that should be enough to encourage the Council to shake off its lethargy, finally decide to adopt clear guidelines for the peace process and establish a mechanism that would make it possible to put an end to the occupation.

For our part, we as the Arab parties would like to inform the Council that the Council of Foreign Ministers of the League of Arab States met in Cairo today and reiterated their attachment to the Arab Peace Initiative, initially proposed by the former Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, and endorsed by the Beirut summit of 2002. I would recall that the Initiative called on Israel to do the following: first, to withdraw from all occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan, to the lines of 4 June 1967, and the territories occupied in south Lebanon; secondly, to find a just solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees that is agreed upon and in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III); thirdly, to accept the emergence of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State within the Palestinian territories occupied since 4 June 1967 in the West Bank and Gaza, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In exchange, the Arab States would then consider the Arab/Israeli conflict as having come to an end, conclude a peace agreement with Israel that would offer a path to peace for all countries of the region and establish normal relations with Israel within the framework of that comprehensive peace. The Initiative also stipulated, with respect to refugees, that it was essential to refuse any plan to integrate Palestinians that was contrary to their special status in the Arab host countries. Furthermore, the Chair of the Arab Ministerial Committee for the Arab Peace Initiative, who visited Washington, D. C., in April 2013, stated, after his meeting with the American authorities that the 1967 borders, if adopted as the basis for a two-State solution, could include certain agreed exchanges of similar territories.

It is important to underscore that the Arab States have reiterated their commitment to the Arab Peace Initiative at all the Arab summits that have taken place since the Beirut summit, including the summits held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, in 2003; Tunis in 2004; Algiers in 2005; Khartoum in 2006; Riyadh in 2007; Damascus in 2008; Doha in 2009; Sirte, Libya, in 2010; Baghdad in 2012; Doha in 2013; and Kuwait in 2014.

Furthermore, the Arab Ministers for Foreign Affairs have reiterated their commitment to the Initiative in every meeting that has been held here in New York and in Cairo and in their extraordinary meetings. Following the Riyadh summit of 2007, two Arab Ministers for Foreign Affairs, specifically those of Egypt and Jordan, visited Israel and met with Israeli officials with a view to implementing the Arab Peace Initiative and facilitating the start of direct negotiations. After the adoption by the Beirut summit in 2002 of the Arab Peace Initiative, the States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation have held five regular and extraordinary summits: in Putrajaya, Malaysia, in 2003; in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in 2005; in Dakar in 2008; in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in 2012; and in Cairo in 2013. All of those summits

underscored the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative as the basis on which the peace process should be built.

All of those facts clearly demonstrate that, since the Beirut summit of 2002, the Arab approach has been the path of peace. It is a collective, unanimous, strategic and constant approach. It has become the approach adopted by 57 Islamic States. However, that approach, which is based on the land-for-peace principle, has not had a partner on the Israeli side. Such a peace would be a real peace, and not merely a slogan used by Israel to prevaricate and impose a new reality on the ground. Indeed, that might explain the failure of all the peace negotiations over the years. The question is: when will the Israelis realize that occupation is the antithesis of peace?

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia): I have the honour to speak today on behalf of the member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting and for personally presiding over it. I would also like to extend our condolences and sympathy to the victims of the terrorist acts that took place recently in Pakistan, Lebanon, Nigeria and France.

Additionally, I would like to congratulate the newly elected members of the Security Council — Angola, Malaysia, New Zealand, Spain, and Venezuela — and wish them well in fulfilling the important role expected of them during this critical period in the work of the Council, especially in conjunction with the issue discussed today. I would also like to extend our appreciation to Argentina, Australia, Korea, Luxembourg and Rwanda for their hard work and dedication on the Council during their membership.

I wish to convey to you, Mr. President, our gratitude for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and for your country's commendable position in supporting the just cause of the Palestinian people. I also thank the Assistant Secretary-General for today's briefing.

The OIC reaffirms its commitment and unwavering support for the Palestinian people's quest to realize their legitimate and inalienable rights of self-determination, freedom from occupation, recognition of their independent State of Palestine with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, and the end of Israeli occupation over Arab lands, including the Syrian Golan Heights and Lebanese territories. The international community has demonstrated overwhelming support towards ending the grave injustices against the Palestinian people, including in the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and the recent Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention convened by the Depositary in Switzerland.

The United Nations designation of 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is but one important example of such efforts. However, in an ironic and most disappointing way, 2014, the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, ended with the Security Council failing to shoulder its responsibility towards the peaceful resolution of this conflict and setting a deadline for the end of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab lands. The OIC regrets that the Council missed a vital opportunity to pursue a just resolution that would have addressed the plight of the Palestinian people and that it has retreated from implementing its own past resolutions.

All the while, Israel, the occupying Power, continued to sabotage all negotiation efforts, which ended in a complete stalemate of the peace process. Despite the intentional community's rallying behind the negotiation process to end Israeli occupation and achieve a lasting peace based on the two-State solution, Israel has persisted in its oppressive, apartheid and colonial policies towards the Palestinian people. Israel, the occupying Power, continued to violate international law. This includes the construction of the apartheid wall, settlement expansion and implanting illegal settlers, whose number has doubled from 250,000 to over 500,000. The use of excessive and lethal force against the unarmed civilian population, forced evictions, forcible transfer of civilians, demolition of homes and confiscation of properties, coercive detention of more than 6,000 Palestinians and refusal to prosecute terrorist Israeli settlers are examples of Israeli brutality. This is in addition to Israel's aggression waged against the Gaza Strip, which resulted in killing more than 2,200 Palestinians and injuring and maiming more than 11,000 people and destroying many homes. Israel, the occupying Power, has yet to be held responsible for its crimes and illegal practices. Rather, it continues to enjoy impunity and lack of accountability.

The OIC holds Israel responsible for all its violations of international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law and will continue to call upon the international community and the Security Council to hold Israel accountable and to compel it to cease its illegal acts and policies. We also hold Israel responsible for the escalation in the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and we warn against any move towards changing the demographic make-up and identity of the city.

Today, we are compelled to ask the Council: what route to peace and justice is left for the Palestinians in the face of Israeli practices that threaten to undermine any prospects and viability of the two-State solution? This is not a rhetorical question but one with serious implications, not only for the lives of Palestinians living under brutal occupation, but also for the maintenance of peace and security in the world.

Despite all the recent setbacks, it is time for the Security Council not to impede but rather serve as a platform to put an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab lands and realize the Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. It is only through courage, leadership and owning up to moral responsibility that a just and peaceful resolution to this conflict is possible. It is time for the Council to show these qualities in this regard.

The OIC expresses its deep concern over the continued escalation of violence, destruction, killing and heinous crimes committed against the Syrian people, resulting in the rapid deterioration of the humanitarian situation. According to the United Nations, Syria is now the worst humanitarian situation in the world. We call upon all Member States to uphold the pledges made and further respond to the funding appeals by United Nations agencies. It is not only a human tragedy, but a moral catastrophe when Syrian children are dying because of extreme weather or are brutally murdered under the world's eyes.

The OIC reiterates that the only way to end the Syrian crisis is through a peaceful negotiated solution. Accordingly, we call upon the Security Council to exert its power to move the political process forward. We call upon the relevant Member States to support the work of the Special Envoy, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, in his mission. with the aim of helping to establish a transitional Government with complete executive powers, in accordance with the Geneva Declaration. Further deterioration, radicalization and spread of violence can be eradicated only through holding accountable all those responsible for the bloodshed, violence, war crimes and crimes against humanity and paving the way for democracy, freedom, security and stability.

I would like to continue speaking in my national capacity.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia affirms that the Palestinian question is its foremost concern and that it will spare no effort in providing support to our Palestinian brethren in their conflict with Israel, the occupying Power, through political and legal efforts and economic support. The Kingdom affirms that the Security Council cannot recuse or dissociate itself from any responsibility, under any pretext. Rather, it must make courageous resolutions that lead to restoring the Palestinian people's rights and must stand up against Israeli practices of aggression that aim at eradicating the Palestinian presence.

A little while ago, we listened to the Permanent Representative of Israel lecture us on history in a rather amusing and entertaining manner. His account of history, however, has absolutely nothing to do with the truth. Israel's representative has every right to conduct a historical debate, but he will fail to divert attention from the occupation of a military Power which has lasted over 50 years and whose time to end has come.

If Israel and its supporters say that the solution must be through negotiations, there have been all kinds of negotiation in the past 20 years — direct talks, indirect talks, international conferences, good offices, understandings, goodwill initiatives — call it whatever one wants, clearly we have made efforts with regard to the Palestinian question. But the problem is always the lack of political will on the part of Israel to take steps to respond to the Arab Peace Initiative, courageously put forth by Arab countries in 2002. We ask the question: would Israel have been able to carry out one act of aggression after another had the Council adopted a firm position vis-à-vis holding Israel accountable for its crimes against the Palestinian people and had it stood up to its policies of aggression, the building of settlements, the confiscation of territory and attempts to Judaize occupied Jerusalem, obliterate its identify and falsify its Islamic and Christian history, as well as the serious violations of international law?

Saudi Arabia will spare no effort until the Palestinian people have their legitimate and inalienable rights restored to them, establish their independent State along the lines of 4 June 1967, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, and achieve a just solution to the question of Palestinian refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III), as well as the total Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan and the occupied Lebanese territory.

The situation in sisterly Syria over the past four years is the greatest humanitarian tragedy of this century. The Syrian authorities are still continuing their genocidal campaign, using all sorts of conventional and unconventional weapons, including chemical weapons, chlorine gas, arbitrary bombing and explosive barrels, in addition to undertaking sieges and resorting to humiliation and torture, thereby claiming the lives of over 200,000 people and creating over 10 million refugees.

My delegation denounces the presence of foreign armed groups in Syria. On many occasions, the Saudi Government has emphasized the danger posed by terrorist groups transcends borders and that we must stand up to such groups and eliminate them completely. That is the most significant way to guarantee the safety and security of the whole world. Combating terrorism in Syria means that we have to remove all foreign terrorist fighters from that country, stop the brutal crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the Syrian regime over the past four years, hold all those involved in shedding the blood of the Syrian people accountable and ensure they do not enjoy impunity.

We value the major efforts made by United Nations entities in delivering humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people. Despite all those efforts, we are extremely concerned about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria We demand that sanctions be imposed against all those who impede the delivery of the humanitarian assistance. We also call upon donor countries to live up to their pledges, in addition to responding to the appeal of the United Nations for voluntary contributions to provide emergency assistance for more than 12 million people in Syria.

Saudi Arabia also values the latest diplomatic efforts aimed at finding a negotiated political solution. Such initiatives must be based on the terms of reference of the Geneva process. We also welcome the statement by the representative of the Russian Federation that his country's initiative is based on such terms of reference. Those initiatives must lead to the implementation of an agreement for a transition Government with complete terms of reference that makes it possible for the Syrian people to achieve their ambitions in freedom and dignity, in a manner that would preserve the country's territorial integrity and independence and the rights of Syrians of all ideologies and sects.

The President *(spoke in Spanish)*: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Dehghani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (NAM).

I wish to convey to you, Mr. President, the Movement's appreciation for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, at this critical time for Palestine and the Palestinian people and for the international community at the start of a new year. I also thank Assistant Secretary-General ad interim Jens Toyberg-Frandzen for hiss briefing today.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the new members of the Security Council — Angola, Malaysia, New Zealand, Spain and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela — and to wish them success in their endeavours during their tenure as members of the Council.

The Non-Aligned Movement takes this opportunity to reaffirm its long-standing solidarity with the Palestinian people, and reiterates its support for the realization of their legitimate national aspirations and inalienable rights, including to self-determination and freedom in an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as a just solution for the plight of the Palestine refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

The question of Palestine has been on the United Nations agenda for more than 67 years now. Yet, as regrettably reaffirmed with the failure of the Security Council to uphold its responsibilities during the vote on 30 December 2014 (see S/PV.7354), the Palestinian people have no glimmer of hope for realizing their right to self-determination and freedom and finally experiencing the justice and peace so long denied to them.

Despite decades of participation in peace efforts undertaken in good faith and a clear commitment by the Palestinian people and their leadership to international law, which was reaffirmed by the recent accession by the State of Palestine to several international conventions and treaties, the Palestinian plight and predicament has worsened on all fronts. That is directly due to Israel's illegal policies and practices that have entrenched the occupation and undermined all peace efforts, to the point where the viability of the two-State solution has been cast into grave doubt. As we witness escalating breaches of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law by Israel, the occupying Power, we stress that it is high time to take a historic step towards ending the occupation of the Palestinian land and paving the way for a just and peaceful settlement to the conflict. In doing so, the Council would fulfil its duty under the Charter of the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace and security and genuinely contribute to a solution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which remains a source of grave concern for the region, the international community and for prospects of global peace and stability.

In 2014, despite its proclamation by the United Nations as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the situation deteriorated dramatically, and the brutalization of the Palestinian people reached new heights under the Israeli military aggression waged against a besieged and blockaded Gaza Strip in July and August. Israel has not been held accountable for those crimes, despite the fact that the occupying forces launched tens of thousands of missiles, bombs, artillery shells and live ammunition against a defenceless Palestinian civilian population in an inhuman and criminal onslaught that killed more than 2,200 Palestinians, the majority of them civilians, including hundreds of children and women, injured and maimed more than 11,000, displaced hundreds of thousands and terrorized the entire population. It also caused vast destruction of homes and vital civilian infrastructure, hospitals and schools, including more than 100 United Nations facilities and the majority of schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, as well as mosques, churches and agricultural and industrial properties, further decimating the Palestinian social fabric and economy and traumatizing the population.

Another year has passed, and the suffering and injustice borne by the Palestinian people continue. Another year has taken us farther away from realizing the just, lasting and comprehensive peace long sought by Palestinians and other peace-loving countries on a basis of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

NAM strongly condemns Israel's continued and escalating settlement construction throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around occupied East Jerusalem, in a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and United Nations resolutions, including those of the Security Council. Those and other systemic violations, such as the demolition of homes, the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians, the arrest and detention of Palestinians, including children, and incessant violence, terror and provocations by Israeli settlers and extremists, including at sensitive religious sites, particularly the Al-Aqsa Mosque, have worsened conditions on the ground, increasing already grave doubts about Israel's claim of commitment to this twisted solution and peace.

Despite serious international efforts and repeated calls for a peaceful solution in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Israeli military occupation of Palestinian and Arab lands continues, as do the denial and violation of the inalienable rights and freedoms of Palestinians by Israel, the occupying Power. The failure to resolve this question continues to undermine the credibility of our international system and the rule of law. The Security Council cannot remain on the sidelines in the quest for a just and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine, especially when the situation continues to deteriorate so dramatically and threatens to become completely destabilized. NAM therefore urges the Council to act forthwith, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, to end the plight of the Palestinian people and take resolute action to end the Israeli occupation and this decades-long injustice.

It was in that context that the Palestinian Government and the Arab Group took an initiative designed to mobilize the Security Council to act to defuse this volatile situation, reaffirm the basis for a just resolution of the conflict and redress of a historic injustice, and establish a political horizon capable of restoring hope to the Palestinian people that the 47-year Israeli military oppression and occupation of their land could soon come to an end, by delineating a time frame for ending the occupation and affirming that justice, freedom and peace are within reach.

However, the Security Council has again failed to uphold its responsibility to address the crisis and contribute meaningfully to a peaceful solution in the Middle East, even leaving its own resolutions unimplemented. The results of the recent vote on a draft resolution (S/2014/916) showed that the Security Council as a whole is not ready or willing to accept its responsibilities, contrary to the overwhelming international consensus on the issue, as reflected in the vote of 180 Member States in the General Assembly supporting the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and freedom and the many other declarations from around the globe — governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental — calling for an end to the prolonged conflict.

NAM believes the message is clear worldwide. It is high time to end the abhorrent Israeli occupation and impunity that have brought so much suffering, caused so many crises and sown so much instability and anger throughout the Middle East, and that continues to undermine regional and global peace and security. Besides its manifestation in the annual resolutions of the General Assembly, that message was strongly reaffirmed at the recent Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention convened by Switzerland, the Convention's depositary. It also continues to be reaffirmed in the motions by numerous European Parliaments calling for the recognition of the State of Palestine and by the fact that 135 countries already recognize the State of Palestine. It is therefore most regrettable that the Security Council remains paralysed and unable to act to uphold its own responsibilities in this regard, with all the implications that has for peace and security in the Middle East and beyond. Nevertheless, NAM once again calls on the Council, and will continue to do so, to act in accordance with its duties under the Charter, and stresses the important role the NAM caucus members on the Council can play in that regard.

Lebanon continues to suffer from the persistent Israeli violations of its borders and incursions into its territory that were followed by years of occupation and aggression. Unfortunately, Israel still continues to violate Lebanese air space, intensifying its incursions over Lebanon. Such activities are a blatant violation of Lebanese sovereignty and the relevant international resolutions, in particular resolution 1701 (2006), whose provisions should be implemented in a manner that guarantees consolidation of the foundations of stability and security in Lebanon and prevents Israel from undertaking its daily violations of Lebanese sovereignty.

With regard to the occupied Syrian Golan, the Movement condemns all the measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the area, and which were intensified after the outbreak of the Syrian crisis. The Non-Aligned Movement demands once again that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in compliance with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

I would now like to make some brief remarks in my national capacity, in response to the allegations made by the representative of the Israeli regime about my country.

It is ridiculous that a regime that is famous for its atrocities and apartheid policies, well documented by the United Nations, its repeated violations of internationally recognized borders, war crimes, crimes against humanity, its attacks and threats of use of force against its neighbours and beyond; a regime with an atrocious record of developing, producing and stockpiling various kinds of inhumane weapons, including weapons of mass destruction; a regime that has mass-murdered thousands of Palestinians, including women and children, in Gaza, as recently as last summer, should preach peace, democracy, the rule of law and freedom to the Security Council and the international community, in order to cover up its heinous record of State terrorism, aggression and occupation.

We should not allow this regime to make a mockery of international institutions any longer. The Islamic Republic of Iran, by reaffirming the inherent right of Lebanese and Palestinian resistance forces to oppose occupation, repel aggression and reclaim their occupied lands, wishes to see peace and justice prevail in the Middle East, which requires respect for international norms and regulations by all, without discrimination.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council. I would like to say how much I appreciate the constructive positions of Chile with regard to the situation in the Middle East.

Today we are discussing once again the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. The region as well as the world recently experienced a number of very serious incidents, namely, the rise of international terrorism, which afflicts Egypt as it does many other countries. We condemn such terrorism in the strongest terms and are determined to fight it together with other countries. In that connection, I would like to note that the continued occupation of the Palestinian territories provides fertile ground for terrorists and allows them to thrive. That increases the complexity of the situation and has an adverse impact on the peace process, which we would like to see resumed so that the occupation may be brought to an end and a Palestinian State may be realized, coexisting in peace with Israel. We believe that this would contribute to comprehensive development in the region as well as prosperity for all of its people. It would also protect us from a range of dangerous, including terrorism, which has just reared its ugly head in the form of unjustifiable atrocities in France.

The Security Council has been the venue for drawn-out talks over recent weeks regarding the Palestinian question. It seems clear that there is consensus concerning the conditions for a definitive and fair solution to the Palestinian question. There is consensus on the need to put an end to the Israeli occupation. There is also consensus regarding the need to establish a sovereign Palestinian State extending throughout its territory within the borders of June 1967. Furthermore, there is consensus on the status of East Jerusalem as the capital of such a Palestinian State. There was further consensus on the need to reach a fair solution for refugees.

Those points of consensus were reflected in the Arab draft resolution (S/2014/916) presented to the Security Council in December with a view to establishing a timeline for the peace process. Those points of consensus were also reflected in the French proposal. However, unfortunately, the draft resolution did not gain enough support within the Council, in spite of the international consensus. We wonder, therefore, why a solution seems so far off despite the existence of such consensus. The answer to that question is undoubtedly key to the resolution of the Palestinian question, and it goes as follows.

First of all, there has to be a real willingness among the major international actors to achieve a definitive solution. Some of those countries, at the same time as they ask the parties to the conflict to take difficult decisions, do not exert pressure on those parties to change position or try to dissuade them from certain practices that are harmful and threaten the peace process, such as the building of settlements. The witholding of tax revenues by Israel undermines the Palestinian Authority and prevents it from going about its business.

Such genuine will must also be exhibited by the parties to the conflict, instead of electoral calculations, domestic considerations or internal infighting. The parties must rise above such considerations and must not sacrifice the interests of their own people who aspire for peace. There is no doubt that the Israeli people want peace just as much as the Palestinian and other Arab peoples do. It is clear that the Arab Peace Initiative, proposed into 2002, is undoubtedly the most eloquent message of peace from the Arab peoples to the Israeli people. The peace process must therefore not become a mirage. The initiative must be met with a response.

The international community must also support the Palestinian Authority to establish its authority in Gaza in order to rebuild and restore hope to thousands of Palestinians who are suffering under the weight of destruction and war. That population must be allowed to live like other populations around the world. That is not only a moral duty, but it is crucial for protecting the Palestinian people from extremism and despair. In that context, we call on all countries to honour their commitments to rebuild Gaza undertaken at the Cairo Conference of last October.

Unfortunately, some members of the international community approach this conflict without genuinely trying to address its root causes. That is an unacceptable approach. We all know that the current situation is so volatile that it cannot continue. A definitive solution to the conflict is more crucial than ever. The Security Council must therefore assume its responsibilities. What I have just set out is the only way to achieve a just and comprehensive solution to the situation in Palestine. If we do not take that into account, stability will continue to elude the Middle East and the dangers facing all parties will continue to grow.

I should now like to turn to the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, where the people are struggling in the throes of a crisis that has now lasted for five years with no hopes for a solution on the horizon. The conditions for any solution include the preservation of the territorial integrity of Syria and the need to respond

to the legitimate demands of the Syrian people for change and reform. Terrorism in Syria must be eradicated so that it does not spread to the neighbouring countries, which are under unbearable pressure, hosting hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees. In that context, we fully support the efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and hope that his efforts will lead to a political process bringing together all the parties the conflict.

We also welcome the immense contribution made by the United Nations and several countries to meet the humanitarian needs on the Syrian people. We also appreciate the efforts of the Russian Federation to establish dialogue between the Syrian Government and opposition through the conference to be held soon in Moscow.

We will spare no effort no diplomatic effort to achieve a political solution. In doing so, we will draw on our good relationships with all of the parties concerned. We hope that this will lead to a solution that brings an end to this bloody conflict.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Masood Khan (Pakistan): Over the past several months, we have seen both positive and negative developments with regard to Palestine. The Palestinian Authority has ratified more than a dozen major international treaties and conventions, including the Geneva Conventions, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the United Nations Convention the Law of the Sea. What is more, the United Nations has accepted Palestinian ratification of those treaties. Palestine is poised to become a member of the International Criminal Court in April. Sweden recognized Palestine. And the British, Irish, Spanish and French Parliaments voted for Palestinian statehood. That has created a compelling case for Palestine's integration as a fully independent State into the international community.

Those developments are writing on the wall. Yet, surprisingly, the Security Council failed to adopt a draft resolution (S/2014/916) that merely asked for the endorsement of universally parameters: the recognition of Palestinian statehood, Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders, a Palestinian capital in Jerusalem, a three-year deadline to end the occupation of the West Bank and the lifting of the siege of Gaza. The draft resolution, regrettably, foundered on dictates of realpolitik. Otherwise, there was strong justification for its adoption.

The absence of engagement between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, the constant state of fear and animosity between the Palestinians and the Israelis and the ongoing violations of the Palestinians' rights do not constitute a state of limbo, but rather a very precarious and perilous situation. Violence and conflict can erupt at any moment. The Secretary-General, speaking at an informal meeting of the General Assembly on 8 January said, "We must not resign ourselves to any further worsening of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians".

Diplomatic efforts have become tenuous and do not seem to promise either re-engagement between the parties nor a solution to the conflict. The efforts being made by United States Secretary of State John Kerry, the one track that offered some hope, seems to have lost momentum. Diplomacy must be re-energized and intensified. Some members of the Council said in December last year that they might reconsider the issue of Palestine in 2015. The Palestinian Authority is considering bringing the parameters draft resolution to the Council once more. We would encourage Council members to work on such a draft resolution, which could pave the way to a clearly marked pathway to peace. It would put the Council back at the helm of maintaining peace and security in the Middle East.

Our fresh push towards peace is urgently needed. Some steps that would help are these: Israel should immediately release the withheld tax revenues; the blockade of Gaza should be lifted; pledges for the reconstruction of Gaza should be honoured by contributors and donors; and international efforts to resume the peace process based on internationally agreed parameters should be re-initiated.

No matter what we say, Palestine and Israel have a symbiotic relationship. They will have to coexist for generations to come within the same geographical neighbourhood. Therefore, the only path to a viable and sustainable peace is the establishment of the State of Palestine based on the pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, and the evacuation of all Arab lands by Israel, including the Syrian Golan.

In the four years of the conflict, the past year was the deadliest in Syria. This progressive deterioration must be halted. We fully support the Secretary-General's Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura's efforts to arrange

localized ceasefires and initiate a political process. Last year saw the destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons programme, which demonstrated what could be accomplished when the Council was united. Our experience of the past four years shows that there are no shortcuts to peace in Syria, that military means and killing sprees will not produce a solution and that intense and results-oriented diplomatic engagement was the only option we have for pursuing and delivering peace.

In the past year, the civil war in Syria and a fragile peace in Iraq have produced an even bigger monster: the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The world was caught unaware. Now the poisonous philosophy of that hydra-headed monster is spreading to other parts of the world. Pakistan unequivocally condemns terrorism perpetrated by ISIL against States and individuals and rejects the notion of the so-called caliphate by ISIL. Pakistan is fully implementing resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014) in letter and spirit. We must work together to stop the tide to save our global civilization.

Finally, I would like to say that I participated as a Council member in the debate on the Middle East (see S/PV.6894) in late 2012. The atmosphere was gloomy and one of bewilderment, self-flagellation and helplessness. Two years down the road, as I prepare to leave my post, nothing has changed. Palestine was an issue 100 years ago. It is still a vexing issue that keeps the entire international community hostage. This historic impasse must be broken through enlightened and resolute diplomacy.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Abdrakhmanov (Kazakhstan): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate on a very important topic. As this is my first statement at the Security Council this year, I would like to offer congratulations to the newly elected members of the Security Council — Angola, Malaysia, New Zealand, Spain and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

My country expresses its serious concern about the ongoing violations in the Palestinian occupied territories and in the whole region of the Middle East. Developments there, such as continuing settlement and construction processes in the occupied territories, do not make it possible to speak about any improvement in the situation of regional and international peace and security.

My country reiterates its recognition of the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, the creation of an independent State of Palestine within the 1967 borders, peacefully coexisting with Israel, and obtaining full-fledged membership in the United Nations. The two-State solution is the only viable option for a durable peace reached through direct and meaningful negotiations.

We therefore call on Israeli and Palestinian leaders to show wisdom, responsibility and political will to reach a historic peace agreement that meets the legitimate aspirations of their peoples. The ultimate goal of all efforts should be the restoration and promotion of peace processes in accordance with Security Council resolutions and other relevant mechanisms. All parties must fulfil their commitments responsibly as stipulated by the road map. We commend the internal Palestinian reconciliation process and the consolidation of the efforts of the Government of Palestine to alleviate the situation. Kazakhstan expresses its hope that international actions led by the United Nations will contribute to the resumption of further peace talks.

Kazakhstan is very alarmed about the overall situation in the Middle East. Well-coordinated international efforts need to be brought to bear to stop the senseless bloodshed and find an inclusive political solution. My country strongly condemns atrocities against civilian populations and foreign citizens and attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which pose a major threat to the region and its population, including children from our part of the world. We stress that terrorism can be defeated only by a sustained and comprehensive approach, with the active cooperation of all States and international and regional organizations.

We strongly believe that all peaceful means are appropriate for preventing tension and resolving conflict. In addition to politicians and diplomats, religious and spiritual leaders should be involved in such processes to soften the hearts of enemies.

Kazakhstan has worked hard to build a culture of tolerance and respect through, inter alia, the regular convening of the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, where leaders of various beliefs together seek ways to promote peace based on spiritual values. As an example, the participants in the fourth Congress in 2012, in Astana, included the two Chief Rabbis of Israel — Sephardic and Ashkenazi — the

Secretary General of the Muslim World League, Islamic leaders from the Middle East States, prominent theologians including from Al-Azhar University, in Egypt, Orthodox Christian Patriarchs, Holy See Cardinals and Buddhist, Hindu and Taoist leaders from different parts of the world.

The fifth Congress will take place in Astana in June. Its theme will be dialogue among religious leaders and politicians in the name of peace and development. We believe that the Congress could serve as a showcase of ways to contribute to dispute resolution efforts through mutual respect and understanding.

In conclusion we again urgently call on all parties, especially those with real political power and influence, to commit their political will to ensuring lasting peace and security in the Middle East and freedom and justice for all people through a genuine multilateral approach.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Ms. Bolaños Pérez (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, let me commend the leadership and the work carried out by Chile during its presidency of the Security Council this month. I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary-General ad interim for Political Affairs Jens Anders Toyberg-Frandzen for his informative briefing.

Guatemala remains steadfast in holding that diplomacy and dialogue are the best way to achieve a long-term solution in each of the conflicts affecting the Middle East. We continue to believe that a political solution to the differences that have divided the region for years, is the only solution that can provide stability and lasting security. That could not be truer than in the case of Palestine. Since the suspension of the latest peace talks in April 2014, we have witnessed the rapid deterioration of the situation between Israel and Palestine. Moreover, the essential two-State solution seems increasingly elusive. In that respect, we agree with the many voices saying that a political future is necessary to fulfil the legitimate needs of both peoples and lead to a final and fair agreement. However, achieving that goal will require the necessary measures.

That is why the international community must play an active role in supporting and promoting the peace process. We value the principle of shared responsibility and therefore believe that the active participation of both the Quartet and the Security Council in the peace process can serve to generate new momentum and thereby enable the parties to take further steps with greater responsibility towards a comprehensive, just and lasting peace. The parties must make genuine and renewed efforts including, inter alia, the total lifting of the blockade, an end to the construction of illegal settlements, refraining from provocative acts, a cessation of rocket-fire, and ensuring the legitimate security concerns of Israel and the existence of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

Finally, as is well known, Guatemala strongly values and supports all international instruments established to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially the Rome Statute. That is why we support the universalization of those instruments and reject any attempt to prevent other States from accessing them. In that regard, we do not see Palestine's accession to the Rome Statute as an obstacle to peace or to direct negotiations seeking a final agreement on all underlying issues. The promotion of an environment conducive to peace, accountability and respect for human rights cannot but help to relaunch the peace process between the parties.

We recognize the enormous challenges facing the parties in their search for a political solution, both nationally and internationally, but that is the only road available. It is our political and historical responsibility, as States members of the international community, to support all measures that can help in achieving the goal.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland.

Mr. Sveinsson (Iceland): First of all allow, me to thank Chile for convening this open debate. We are seeing a period of exceptional instability in the Middle East. The vicious conflict in Syria has become the epicentre, and the intractability of certain conflicts in the region makes it all the more important to look for places where progress can be made.

The long-standing conflict between the Palestinian people and Israel should be possible to solve. Indeed, a solution has been on the table for many years — the two-State solution. There are viable parties on both sides who can make the deal, but both sides need to commit in word and deed to the two-State solution and they must refrain from actions which undermine the viability of the only solution which will bring peace. The expansion of Israeli settlements and the expropriation of land in Palestine continue. This is a clear breach of

international law. We join others in calling on Israel to stop all settlement activity. In particular, we urge Israel to reverse the decision on the forced resettlement of Bedouins in the West Bank.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza remains dire, with recent news of people dying from exposure. The situation must be urgently improved through constructive cooperation between the Israeli authorities and the Palestinian authorities. The blockade must be lifted immediately and Gaza needs to be allowed to function as a normal economy. At the same time, security concerns on both sides must be addressed. It is important that the Palestinian authorities take on real governmental responsibility for Gaza. Militant action from Gaza is unacceptable and will lead to further suffering and away from a negotiated solution.

Iceland recognized the State of Palestine in 2011. We welcome the recent recognition by our fellow Nordic State, Sweden. That signal, added to that of many other States Members of the United Nations, encompasses the vision of a State based on the 1967 borders. Iceland is pleased to see that the State of Palestine has ratified several international agreements. In particular, the decision of the State of Palestine to accede to the Rome Statute should be applauded. As a long-time supporter of the International Criminal Court, Iceland encourages all United Nations Member States to put themselves under the jurisdiction of the Court, whose purpose is to help end impunity for crimes deemed especially serious by the international community. Iceland also welcomes the State of Palestine to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which continues to be of utmost importance to Iceland and will undoubtedly come to benefit Palestine as a coastal State.

The time to negotiate all final status issues is long overdue. The failure of the Security Council to provide a timeline that might assist in bringing about a solution is disappointing. There is consensus on the urgency. This is a conflict that can be resolved, but if that is to happen the Security Council needs to be more proactive.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Mukerji (India): We congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and for personally presiding over this quarterly debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I would also like to thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs for his briefing earlier today. And we warmly welcome the new members that joined the Council this year: Angola, Malaysia, New Zealand, Spain and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

This quarterly debate is important in that it gives us an opportunity to take stock of the developments in the Middle East peace process. We would like to reiterate our support for an amicable resolution of this long-standing issue. We are concerned that the debates here in the Security Council have not achieved the objective of such a peaceful solution. The effectiveness of the Council has therefore been brought into question.

We are particularly worried that there was a downward trend last year in the peace process. Efforts for serious negotiations between the parties were inconclusive. In addition, we were faced with the unfortunate situation of a resumption and escalation in the tragic conflict in Gaza, which resulted in a large number of civilian casualties and heavy damage to property.

India's deep association with, and continuing commitment to, Palestine is rooted in our modern history, which goes back to our struggle for independence. India's position on the issue of Palestine is very clear. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote in his message on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, on 21 November 2014, India reaffirms its support for the cause of Palestine and solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, within secure and recognized borders, side-by-side and at peace with Israel and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Apart from political support to the Palestinian cause, India continues to support the development and nation-building efforts of Palestine by consistently extending technical and financial assistance to Palestine. We contribute $1 million annually to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. India recently pledged $4 million in response to the national early recovery and reconstruction plan for Gaza. We are also implementing development projects in Palestine jointly with Brazil and South Africa, within the framework of the India, Brazil and South Africa group, and have pledged $1 million for a new project to reconstruct the Atta Habib Medical Centre in Gaza.

Addressing the ministerial-level meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement's Committee on Palestine in September 2014, our Minister of External Affairs reiterated that India welcomed the ceasefire between Palestine and Israel and called upon all sides to exercise maximum restraint, avoid taking any actions that may lead to a violation of the present ceasefire and work towards a comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian issue. We remain firmly convinced that dialogue remains the only viable option that can effectively address the issue.

We are deeply concerned about rising tensions in East Jerusalem. The imperative need is for urgent de-escalation, restraint, an avoidance of provocation and a return to the peace process. Diplomacy and statesmanship must prevail over hatred and violence. There is no other road to a lasting peace.

We are deeply concerned with the activities of radicalized and extremist groups in the northern parts of Iraq and Syria, as their dangerous exacerbation of sectarian and extremist tensions has a critical impact on the peace and stability of the region. We note that a proscribed terrorist group has twice targeted United Nations peacekeepers in the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force. Efforts must be taken by all parties and stakeholders in the region to curb that trend. Member States must comply with resolutions that proscribe terrorist groups operating in that region. The early and effective prosecution of such groups is essential.

Only such action endorsed by the Council will deter such groups in other parts of the world from committing acts of terror. We believe that the consolidation of political processes and solutions while building durable State institutions will be the most effective way of addressing such extremism and radicalism in the region.

We have consistently supported a Syrian-led, comprehensive political solution to the ongoing crisis in Syria, in alignment with the Geneva communiqué of 2012 (S/2012/522, annex). We would like to add our voice of support for the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, and continue to urge all parties to demonstrate the requisite political will, exercise restraint and commit to seeking common ground in accommodating their differences.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ioannis Vrailas, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Vrailas: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania, and the EFTA country Liechtenstein align themselves with this statement.

I would like to congratulate Chile on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council.

I will read out a shortened version of our statement. The full version is being circulated in the Chamber and will be posted on our website.

The European Union is deeply concerned about the tense situation on the ground, which threatens to take the parties further away from a negotiated solution. The decision of the Israeli Government to halt the transfer of tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority runs counter to Israel's obligations under the Paris Protocol. An effective Palestinian Authority that is committed to non-violence and a peaceful resolution of the conflict is a key element for a two-State solution.

In that regard, the European Union is providing considerable support, including financial assistance, to Palestinian State-building efforts. Those achievements should not be put at risk by not meeting obligations regarding the timely and transparent transfer of tax and custom revenues.

It is a well-known and long-standing fact that the European Union supports the United Nations system and the widest application of its multilateral conventions. An effective system of international criminal justice is based on the broadest possible participation in the Rome Statute, and the European Union remains committed to promoting its universality. On 2 January 2015, Palestine deposited instruments of accession to the Rome Statute, which was welcomed by the President of the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute on 7 January.

The European Union calls again on the Palestinian leadership to use its international status constructively and not to weaken efforts by partners to bring the parties back to the negotiating table.

The European Union deeply deplores and strongly opposes the announced expropriation of land near Bethlehem, the implementation and announcements of plans for new settlement construction, notably in East Jerusalem, the plans to displace Bedouins in the

West Bank and the continued demolitions, including of projects funded by the EU and its member States. We urge Israel to reverse those decisions, which run counter to international law and directly threaten the two-State solution. Recent settlement activity in East Jerusalem seriously jeopardizes the possibility of Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both States.

The European Union renews its call for both parties to resume negotiations towards a peace settlement and to refrain from any actions undermining the viability of a two-State solution or the prospects of a resumption of negotiations. Actions that call into question stated commitments to a negotiated solution must be avoided.

The European Union also urges both sides to renew their commitment to the two-State solution and to build the trust needed for meaningful direct talks. We are committed to promoting and supporting efforts to achieve a lasting peace based on the two-State vision, together with international partners, including in the region.

The European Union underlines its concern at the dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, which still remains to be adequately addressed. It welcomes the international community's pledges towards the reconstruction of Gaza and calls upon countries to swiftly honour them. The European Union urges the parties to fully implement the temporary monitoring mechanism as an important step towards the necessary urgent opening of all crossing points. Obstacles to the effective functioning of the temporary mechanism must be removed quickly. The alleviation of the grave humanitarian situation of the people in Gaza must be given absolute priority.

The European Union notes with grave concern the inflammatory statements made by Hamas and its attempts to rearm. The disarmament of all militant groups in Gaza and the assumption of full Government functions by the Palestinian Authority are critical for a lasting improvement of the situation in Gaza. We reiterate our call for a fundamental change of the political, security and economic situation in the Strip, including the end of the closure.

The parties should urgently make progress towards a durable ceasefire, based on their August agreement in Cairo, to reach an agreement that ends the closure and addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns. We stand ready to play a key role in international efforts to support a durable ceasefire, including through the rapid reactivation and possible extension in scope and mandate of the EU Border Assistance Mission in Rafah and the EU Coordinating Office for Palestinian Police Support missions. The European Union urges all the relevant parties to create the conditions to allow it to play such a role. We also urge all Palestinian factions to end internal divisions.

The unsustainable situation in Gaza, the recent violence in Jerusalem and the deteriorating regional context underline the need for a comprehensive peace, ending all claims and fulfilling the legitimate aspirations of both parties, including those of Israelis for security and those of Palestinians for statehood. The European Union calls on the parties and on all major stakeholders — including the Quartet, the League of Arab States and the Security Council — to take the necessary steps to that end. In this regard, the EU reaffirms its strategic interest in seeing an end to the conflict and is willing to play a major role and actively contribute to the immediate resumption of negotiations aimed at achieving a negotiated solution of all final-status issues without further delay. It recalls its parameters agreed in the July 2014 EU Council conclusions.

The European Union remains gravely concerned regarding the continued deterioration of the humanitarian and security situation in Syria. The EU is committed to fully supporting the Special Envoy De Mistura's efforts to achieve a strategic de-escalation of violence as a basis for a broader sustainable political process. We stand ready to support concretely the development of his proposals.

A reduction of violence will not be achieved without effective monitoring, preferably anchored in the Security Council. Cases of forced surrender imposed by the Al-Assad regime through starvation sieges have been labelled fallaciously as local ceasefires in the past. We are seriously concerned at the intensified military action by the Al-Assad regime against areas held by the opposition, which threatens Special Envoy De Mistura's initiative. We will seek ways to provide practical support for his efforts, notably by contributing to the revival of local governance and administration, to the restoration of basic services, and to the return to normalcy in areas of reduced violence, in particular in Aleppo, as conditions allow.

The overall objective remains an inclusive and Syrian-led political process leading to a transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of all the Syrian

people, based on the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex)and in line with relevant Security Council resolutions. We call on all Syrian parties to show clear and concrete commitment to this process, and to ensure the involvement of civil society and women. We are ready to engage with all regional and international actors with influence over the Syrian parties, and call on them to use their influence constructively towards this end.

The European Union recalls that the moderate opposition, including the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, is a vital element of both a future political settlement and in fighting the extremist groups on the ground in Syria. We encourage internal and external opposition groups alike to unite behind a common strategy in order to present an alternative to the Syrian people. We will seek ways to enhance our political and practical support to the moderate opposition.

We condemn the continued widespread and systematic violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law perpetrated in Syria, in particular by the Al-Assad regime and terrorist groups, as reported by the Commission of Inquiry. The EU recalls in this regard that some of the violations and abuses committed in Syria ma[illegible]mount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. We will spare no effort to ensure that all perpetrators of such acts are held accountable, and we reiterate our call on the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

The EU urges the Al-Assad regime to fully implement resolution 2118 (2013) and the Chemical Weapons Convention, and to take the measures necessary to eliminate its chemical weapons programme completely and irreversibly. We condemn the use of chlorine gas as a chemical weapon by the Al-Assad regime, which is a clear breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention and of resolution 2118 (2013).

The EU urges all parties to fully and immediately comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. We condemn the continuing and new impediments to the delivery of aid, for which the Al-Assad regime bears the primary responsibility. We urge all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, to fully and immediately implement all the provisions of resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) and presidential statement S/PRST/2013/15 of 2 October 2013. We also encourage the United Nations humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners to use border crossings as effectively as possible and to scale-up, to the extent possible, the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all people in need in Syria, in particular in hard-to-reach and besieged areas.

The European Union and its member States continue to play a leading role in the provision of humanitarian aid in response to the crisis, having mobilized so far €3 billion. We will sustain our efforts to provide humanitarian aid to the people affected by the crisis and to build their resilience. We were seriously concerned about the severe lack of funding for the United Nations appeals for 2014, and call on the international community to step up its funding and assistance in view of the winter and in response to the forthcoming 2015 appeals.

The European Union commends the considerable efforts of Lebanon and Jordan, as well as Turkey, in sheltering refugees from Syria. We will spare no effort to continue to help them. The European Union remains fully aware of the immense security challenges that the crisis in Syria poses to Lebanon and Jordan in particular. We reiterate our commitment to seeking ways to further enhance this support to both countries to meet those challenges.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Patriota (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I congratulate the brotherly Republic of Chile on having organized this meeting, chaired by Minister for Foreign Affairs Heraldo Muñoz.

(*spoke in English*)

I thank Assistant Secretary-General ad interim Jens Toyberg-Frandzen for his briefing. Brazil also wishes to acknowledge the interventions of the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Brazil regrets that 2014, the year proclaimed by the General Assembly as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, was marked by the impossibility of realizing the self-determination of the Palestinian people and by further suffering and distrust among Israelis and Palestinians. We witnessed the repetition of acts that reinforced a long and deplorable cycle of violence. Peace talks collapsed after months of dialogue with few commitments.

Israeli settlements and other illegal unilateral activities continued in occupied Palestine. Rockets were launched from the Gaza Strip against Israel. Another round of disproportional use of military force ensued, resulting in a deeply shocking number of Palestinian civilian fatalities in Gaza. Tensions in Jerusalem and the West Bank escalated sharply and violence erupted. In particular, Brazil was concerned with the religious provocations in the old city of Jerusalem, with attempts to violate the status quo of the area around the Dome of the Rock.

While it has been unanimously claimed that the status quo is unsustainable — and it is indeed — we have failed so far to deal with the fundamental aspects of the Palestinian question. Brazil reiterates its appeal for a change in the way we approach the conflict, especially in the Council. The Security Council not only fell short of engaging in promoting a durable peaceful solution to the crisis, but it also failed to act when a draft resolution (S/2014/916) with that goal, broadly based on previous resolutions of the General Assembly and the Council, was brought to a vote. It was another missed opportunity for the Council to discharge its responsibilities, weakening the Organization and continuously shrinking its relevance to the Palestinian question.

Surely, no resolution will, on its own, resolve this lasting issue. Good faith, political will and direct negotiations are essential elements in moving a credible process forward, but an active and constructive role played by the Council is also instrumental in order to achieve peace and stability. We were heartened by the statement made by the representative of New Zealand that subscribed to the same view, and we encourage the Council to consider the suggestions that were made in that regard by Ambassador McLay.

Brazil welcomes the decision of the State of Palestine to join a new batch of international treaties and to accede to the Rome Statute. As a strong supporter of the International Criminal Court's universality as a means of promoting peace and justice, we commend the Palestinian initiative and encourage States that have not yet done so to become parties to the Statute. The resort to multilateral mechanisms, especially those that can provide a measure of justice, redress indignities and overcome double standards, should not be met with reprisals and sanctions. We urge Israel to immediately release all financial resources due to Palestine.

The unrelenting spiral of violence and destruction in Syria continues after almost four years of conflict. The violations of human rights committed by all sides, as consistently denounced by the Human Rights Council's Independent Commission of Inquiry, deserve our strongest condemnation. Brazil firmly believes that the State has a duty to protect its citizens and in no circumstances should violate their rights, mainly using violent measures.

In recent months, the humanitarian situation further deteriorated and now more than half of Syria's population is either internally displaced or seeking refuge abroad. In that sense, we welcome the extension of the measures determined by resolution 2165 (2014) and all the ongoing international efforts to cope with the increasingly dire humanitarian situation.

The insistence in the benefits of militarization and the use of force to purportedly resolve the Syrian crisis have resulted, among other regrettable consequences, in the displacement of millions of people who were forced to leave their homes in order to escape brutality from all sides, especially the heinous attacks and executions perpetrated by the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). We reiterate our strongest condemnation of such atrocities.

Brazil supports the work and innovative efforts brought by Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, with a view to reduce violence, alleviate the people's suffering and build trust for the resumption of negotiations. We reiterate the urgent need to resume the political process and to immediately cease the flow of weapons to all parties in the conflict as a crucial preliminary step in that direction. We associate ourselves with Minister Heraldo Muñoz's expression of support for the efforts of the Government of the Russian Federation to convene a peace dialogue, to which various opposition groups have been invited.

Once again, we commend the outstanding generosity of many countries in the region, including Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Egypt, to receive thousands, and even millions, of Syrian refugees. Brazil praises the hard work done in that regard by Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos and by the High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Antonio Guterres. While encouraging the international community to support that honorable effort, Brazil has received more

than 1,500 refugees from the Syrian conflict and has donated over 4,000 tons of grain to feed people in Syria.

Brazil is concerned about the security and stability in Lebanon. Recent episodes of violence, such as the twin suicide bombing at a crowded cafe in Tripoli last Saturday, reinforce the need to fully support the Lebanese policy of disassociation from regional crises agreed in the Baabda Declaration of June 2012.

Brazil will always support Lebanon in its fight against terrorism and in its pursuit of stability and development. Our participation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, whose Maritime Task Force has been led by a Brazilian official since 2011, therefore plays a prominent role in translating our commitment into practical action.

Brazil remains concerned about the security and humanitarian situation in Iraq. Unfortunately, 2014 was the deadliest year in the country since 2007. Tens of thousands innocent civilians were killed and wounded and millions of people were displaced. The barbaric acts committed by ISIS shocked the world and were the subject of our strongest condemnation.

Brazil commends the steps taken by the new Government in Baghdad and the Kurdish Regional Government in order to solve their disputes concerning oil revenue and budget payments. To succeed in its fight against terrorism and the extremist groups, Iraq has to remain united. The international community should also support Iraq in combating terrorism in a way that is fully and strictly compatible with the Charter of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mamabolo (South Africa): South Africa would like to congratulate your country, Sir, on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January, and to thank you for convening this important debate. Furthermore, my delegation wishes to express its appreciation to AssistantSecretary-General ad interim for Political Affairs Jens Toyberg-Frandzen for his insightful briefing. I also take this opportunity to congratulate all the new members of the Security Council.

South Africa wishes to align itself with the statements to be delivered by the representative of Zimbabwe on behalf of the Southern African Development Community and by the representative of the Kingdom of Morocco on behalf of the African Group, as well as with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

During the commemorative year of the seventieth anniversary of the United Nations, despite the Organization's numerous achievements, it still remains to be seen when there will be a resolution to the decades-long Palestinian and Israeli conflict. This decade's long conflict is a stain on the very purposes and principles of the United Nations as enshrined in the Charter.

Last month, the Council had an opportunity to take decisive action on an issue that has long eluded it and to provide a ray of light to the Palestinians in the occupied territories, who endured a horrible year that witnessed a human tragedy of unprecedented proportions, particularly after the tragic events that took place in Gaza. Unfortunately, once again, to the dismay of the Palestinian people and the international community, the Security Council failed to take decisive action on a Palestinian Government-led initiative that sought to provide a time frame and parameters for ending the illegal occupation of the Palestinian lands.

My delegation wishes to commend Council members that took a principled step by voting in support of the draft resolution (S/2014/916), which had as its sole purpose the peaceful resolution of the conflict and the realization of the two-State solution. While disappointed that the Security Council fell short, South Africa nonetheless welcomes the increasing support and recognition of the Palestinian statehood,as reflected in various national assemblies around the world. such as in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Spain, France and Sweden.

My delegation believes that the only way to bring about genuine and ever-lasting peace between Israel and Palestine is by having comprehensive and unconditional negotiations to deal with all the final-status issues, including the unrelenting and illegal expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories of Palestine as well as the lifting of the Gaza blockade and the continuing illegal occupation of the Palestinian territory. My delegation is supportive of all international efforts aimed at brokering a just resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and urges all parties to the conflict to negotiate in good faith in order to reach a permanent and just solution to the conflict.

South Africa expresses its appreciation to the Government of Switzerland for convening the recent Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, as well as all participating High Contracting Parties for reflecting the overwhelming importance of ensuring the protection of the inalienable human rights of the Palestinian people. The holding of the Conference was an important step in ensuring respect for the provisions of the Convention and international humanitarian law. Last year's violent incursions in Gaza illustrated the need for the international community to do more to protect civilians in that conflict.

We are also concerned by reports that the Israeli Government decided to freeze the transfer of $127.6 million in tax revenue collected on behalf of the Palestinians following the Palestinian leadership decision to become a State party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. South Africa respects the sovereign right and wishes of the State of Palestine to accede to the Rome Statute and calls upon all Member States to refrain from punitive steps in retaliation to that sovereign right.

South Africa would like to call for the redoubling of efforts to rebuild homes and infrastructure destroyed during the war. We remain committed to supporting international efforts to assist the peoples of Palestine and Israel in finding lasting peace in the context of the two-State solution through a negotiated settlement.

With regard to Syria, my delegation is concerned about the humanitarian crisis brought about by nearly four years of Syrian conflict. The conflict in Syria has been characterized by a high number of human casualties and a large number of internally displaced people and refugees fleeing into neighbouring countries, which has had a destabilizing impact on the entire region.

The only hope for the Syrian people lies in the willingness of the parties to the conflict to immediately put an end to the violence and engage each other constructively in a dialogue with a view to reaching an agreement on the political transition based on the Geneva communiqué of June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex). It is the responsibility of the Syrian Government and the opposition to sincerely engage each other in the aim of making difficult decisions concerning the future of Syria.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to extend its deepest condolences to the Governments and peoples of France, Yemen, Nigeria, Australia and Pakistan, who in recent weeks have suffered inhumane and barbaric terrorist attacks. The South African Government joins the international community in condemning all these attacks, and reiterates its stance that terrorism in any form and from whichever quarter cannot be condoned.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. León González (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We support the statement made by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The conflict in the Middle East is an issue of concern for all States Members of the United Nations. A just and lasting peace is the only option for the peoples of that region, and we should focus all of our efforts on achieving that goal. The year 2014 was marked by negative developments for Palestine and Syria, whose peoples suffered the vicissitudes of aggression and war. Cuba reaffirms its unequivocal solidarity with the Palestinian people and its robust and decisive support for all efforts aimed at promoting the recognition of the State of Palestine based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as the right of the State of Palestine to become a full-fledged Member of the United Nations.

Cuba reiterates its demand for an end to the prolonged and illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and other Arab lands, and the immediate, complete and unconditional lifting of the cruel and illegal blockade of Gaza, including the opening of border crossings and control points, in order to enable the free access of humanitarian assistance, supply of goods, and the transit of persons to and from the Gaza Strip on a permanent basis. The building and expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, the separation wall in occupied Palestinian territory, the destruction and confiscation of Palestinian land and property, the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian families, and the transfer of settlers to occupied Palestinian territory are unacceptable. We demand an immediate and complete halt to all Israeli settlement activities in Palestinian territories and respect for the right to return. We also demand an end to reprisals against and blackmailing of the Palestinian Authority, and respect for agreements signed between it and the State of Israel. The colonial policies and practices of Israel against the Palestinian people should end. Israel must once and for all end its provocations and incitements to hatred and terror, crimes of aggression,

arbitrary detention and mass imprisonment, and the genocide against that people.

The Cuban people and Government are proud of the fact that Cuba was one of the first countries to recognize the Palestinian State, following its proclamation in 1988. The number of recognitions has continually grown over the past 26 years. This is an unstoppable process that the Security Council should have supported long ago. Cuba demands without further conditions or delay the acceptance of the request for recognition as a State Member of the United Nations submitted by Palestine. The Security Council also has the responsibility to take specific measures to prevent the assassination of innocent Palestinian civilians and the destruction of the legacy of that heroic people, which has, despite all the tests imposed upon it, struggled to defend its legitimate right to self-determination.

Cuba supports the draft resolution (S/2014/916) that the Arab Group submitted for the consideration of the Security Council, and we denounce the inability of this organ to ensure respect for international law and to defend truth and justice. The Security Council must honour its obligation to promote a negotiated settlement to the Israeli occupation of the State of Palestine. It should establish a definite timeline to end that occupation and turn the resolve of the international community to see the peaceful coexistence of two independent States into reality. The anti-democratic right of veto in the Security Council, which has allowed impunity with regard to the actions of Israel, must end.

It will not be possible to end the Syrian conflict or establish a true and lasting peace that is acceptable to its people and Government will not be possible under the precepts of the regime change policy that has been promoted and publicly supported from the outside. Cuba reiterates its concern for the loss of innocent life as a result of the Syrian conflict, and condemns once again all acts of violence taking place in that country against the civilian population. The supposed protection of human life and the struggle against terrorism cannot be used a pretext for foreign intervention. The Security Council must adopt measures that would genuinely promote a solution to the conflict and combat terrorism against the Syrian people. Its members should reject without hesitation the illegal trafficking in arms to non-State actors in Syria and any other action that prolongs the violent conflict affecting that country.

The sovereignty of the Syrian people should be respected as they exercise their right to self-determination. We pay tribute to the efforts of the Russian Federation to come up with a negotiated solution to the conflict, and we appeal to other interested parties to adopt a similar attitude. All peoples of the Middle East have the right to live in peace and enjoy progress. Cuba reiterates its condemnation of all forms and manifestations of terrorist acts, methods and practices, including State terrorism, wherever they take place and by whomsoever they may be perpetrated.

As a peace-loving country committed to the elimination and prohibition of weapons of mass destruction, Cuba reiterates its support for the establishment of a zone free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, and demands that a conference on the establishment of such a zone be convened without further delay, pursuant to the conclusions and recommendations adopted at the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Cuba reaffirms its willingness to cooperate in achieving a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the conflicts in the Middle East. It is our hope that in 2015 we shall achieve the desired peace in that region and make the Security Council a genuinely effective organ in achieving fair and concrete results leading to the well-being of all peoples of the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to Mr. Seck.

Mr. Seck (*spoke in French*): I would first like to congratulate you, Sir, on Chile's accession to the presidency of the Security Council and the outstanding way in which you humanitarian led its work this month. I also congratulate the Permanent Representatives of Angola, Malaysia, New Zealand, Spain and Venezuela whose countries have just joined the Council. I wish you and them every success in the execution of your duties.

I take this opportunity to express, in no uncertain terms, the Committee's firm condemnation of the terrorist attacks that occurred in Paris on 7 January and the equally heinous acts of terrorism that recently took place in Nigeria, northern Cameroon, northern Mali, Pakistan and, of course, the Middle East. Through me, the Committee would like to express its heartfelt sympathy and condolences to the victims' families, as well as to their bereaved people and Governments.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people observed with great

interest the debate organized by the Council on 30 December (see S/PV.7354). Although the debate did not lead to the adoption of practical measures, as recommended by the Committee in its statement, all members of the Council reaffirmed their commitment to the principle of a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the two-State solution and the exercise of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people in a viable and independent Palestine, living side by side with Israel in peace and security. We take this opportunity to commend the important role played by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, as representative of the Arab countries to the Council, and to encourage it to pursue its commendable efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict, in the knowledge that the status quo is no longer tenable.

With the failure of direct negotiations and the Security Council's inability to act, the State of Palestine has seen fit to join several international treaties, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, in order to strengthen the fight against violations of international law and international humanitarian law, as well as impunity. The Committee regrets that, in response, the occupying Power has chosen to flout its obligations to Palestinian people by holding — who knows for how long? — the tax revenues it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, in accordance with the Oslo accords. This attitude is counterproductive, as is Israel's threat to impose new punitive measures. Furthermore, it is regrettable that the international community, including the Council, has remained silent and inactive on this matter.

Fortunately, at this session States members of the General Assembly have reaffirmed their strong commitment to a settlement ased on established principles and the relevant United Nations decisions. A more significant number of States — most recently Sweden — have also recognized Palestine, while several parliaments — including those of Spain, France, Ireland, Belgium, Portugal and the United Kingdom — as well as the European Parliament, have voted in favour of such recognition, reflecting the resolve of the international public opinion to see an end to this conflict.

While the Committee welcomes the progress made on the ground to date, in particular with regard to the reconstruction of Gaza, as provided in the temporary tripartite mechanism, it believes that much more remains to be done and as soon as possible. More goods and services must be allowed to enter Gaza because tens of thousands of Gazans continue to live in flimsy tents or damaged buildings, exposed to the elements of a rainy and particularly cold winter. In this regard, while we welcome the generous support of donors, the Committee urges Israel to assume its responsibilities as the occupying Power under the Geneva Conventions.

The General Assembly judiciously proclaimed 2014 the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People in its efforts to reinforce Member States' support for the Palestinian people and enhance the possibility of reaching a peaceful settlement of the decades-long conflict. Unfortunately, our hopes were dashed during the Year of Solidarity when direct negotiations failed in the spring and the situation's rapid deterioration led to the devastating war in Gaza in the summer.

The framework of the problem remains the same. Israel continues to occupy the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Settlement construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem continues. Palestinian religious buildings continue to be attacked. In 2014 alone, there were at least 36 attacks on mosques and churches, in addition to the total destruction of 73 mosques and churches in Gaza during the summer's crisis. Moreover, acts of provocation and incitement to violence by settlers and other Israelis remain commonplace.

Alarmed by the current situation, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people joins many speakers here today in stressing that the status quo cannot continue, for the situation is unacceptable and threatens international peace and security. With a view towards the future, the Committee hopes that the Security Council, the supreme organ responsible for international peace and security, will assume its Charter obligation to provide the means to settle the seemingly endless Israel-Palestinian conflict.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): First, I should like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on Chile's presidency of the Security Council this month. I should also like to thank Foreign Minister Muñoz for presiding over this meeting. I congratulate Malaysia, Venezuela, Angola, New Zealand and Spain on their election as non-permanent members of the Security Council and wish them every success.

The United Nations bears a historical and legal responsibility for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with full sovereignty over its entire national territory. This responsibility is based on the provisions of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) which, as we all know, concerns the partition of Palestine, and resolution 273 (III), which defined the terms of Israel's membership of the United Nations, conditional on its compliance with resolution 181 (II) providing for the establishment of the State of Palestine, as well as resolution 194 (III) concerning the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes.

Regrettably, what happened thereafter was quite the opposite. On the one hand, the United Nations implemented half of its resolution 181 (II), and completely set aside the implementation of resolution 194 (III). On the other hand, Israel has launched continuous acts of aggression against the peoples and countries of the region, backed by the unprecedented military, political and economic support of its protectors and sponsors, including by supplying it with various types of sophisticated weaponry, assisting it in acquiring nuclear technology and weapons, and providing it with submarines equipped with missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

Moreover, following its creation, Israel followed a policy of expansion and ethnic cleansing, in spirit and in letter, that led to its occupation of Arab territories in 1967. According to Israeli historians themselves, successive Israeli Governments have committed systematic and documented violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law that are tantamount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Settlement activities represent a top priority in the policies of all Israeli Governments, despite the fact that, according to everyone — including Israel's own apothecaries of the elixir of life and survival — such activities undermine any chance for the establishment of a geographically contiguous and viable Palestinian State and the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. Israel has not stopped there. It has imposed racist laws and desecrated Christian and Muslim holy sites, expelled Palestinians from their homes, and conducted campaigns of arbitrary arrest and human torture, including against children, women and the elected leaders of the Palestinian people.

Today, in spite of all of this, some Council members continue to deny Palestinians even the right to demand their most fundamental rights, including the establishment of their desired State on their national soil and setting a date for ending the occupation. All the while, they continue to protect Israel from any accountability for its unjust, illegal and aggressive policies.

In the framework of that same barbaric Israeli policy, Israel continues its occupation of the Syrian Golan since 1967. Syrian citizens living under the yoke of this occupation suffer a bitter, intolerable reality. We therefore demand that United Nations shoulder its responsibilities by addressing this reality with the seriousness and attention it deserves, in implementation its own relevant resolutions, in particular Security Council resolution 497 (1981). It is unacceptable that the United Nations should remain powerless to compel Israel to implement these resolutions, including those related to the cessation of its systematic and gross violations of human rights, or indeed to put an end to the settlement policy, terrorism, repression, racial discrimination and arbitrary detention against Syrian citizens under occupation that restrict them in all walks of life. Israel is also planning to steal the Golan's natural resources, including water, oil and gas. Recently, the Israeli Supreme Court lifted the ban on prospecting for oil in the occupied Syrian Golan, thereby permitting exploration companies to begin drilling activities in violation of international law.

Facing international silence about its practices, Israel has gone into deeper alliance with the hordes of Takfiri ideologists spreading destruction and chaos in Syria. Israel has waged more than one active aggression on Syrian territory in violation of international law and the 1974 Disengagement Agreement. Such aggressions have increased tension in the region to unprecedented levels in a way that threatens large-scale consequences. What is truly outrageous is that we have heard no condemnation of such acts of aggressions from the Security Council, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, or the Spokesperson of the Secretary-General.

During the current crisis in Syria, Israel has added yet another new chapter to its record of violations by providing support for terrorists in the area of separation in the Golan, including through the treatment of injured terrorists in Israeli hospitals, in violation of the Disengagement Agreement, in a way that endangers the very lives of United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) personnel. That is documented in the Secretary-General's recent report on UNDOF

(S/2014/859), as well as in Israeli media reports. Such support has increased the freedom of movement of terrorist groups, including in particular the Al-Nusra Front, affiliated with Al-Qaida, in the area of separation, and their ability to continuously kidnap UNDOF peacekeepers. We must address this dangerous reality with the required seriousness and attention and without delay, especially since stakeholders in the Department of Peacekeping Operations have demonstrated an unjustified disregard for our warnings and information that we have provided over many years.

I have not touched on the involvement of some well-known regional Arab and international parties in dealing with the terrorists in the area of separation in order to focus exclusively on the item under consideration, dedicated to the Arab-Israeli conflict. For the same reason, I will not respond to the misleading allegations made by the representatives of the United States, United Kingdom, France, Saudi Arabia and the European Union. It is quite obvious to everyone that such allegations merely seek to divert attention from Israeli crimes and to decrease international pressure on Israel, in spite of the fact that the aforementioned Member States in particular do not respect Security Council resolutions related to countering terrorism, specifically resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014). The ink is still wet on those documents.

Despite the difficult circumstances prevailing in Syria, I emphasize here and now that the Syrian Golan is and will remain Syrian territory. We will continue to struggle for its independence until it is fully restored to the borders of 4 June 1967. That right is not subject to negotiation, bargaining or any statute of limitations. No Israeli action will change anything in that regard. Israeli actions, including the so-called decision to annex the Golan, which is in fact the crime of annexing the Golan, are null and void. They have no legal effect, as reaffirmed in the relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly the Security Council's own resolution 497 (1981). What we would like to state and stress about the inevitability of Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Syrian territory also applies to the occupied Palestinian territory and the area that remains under occupation in southern Lebanon.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Khiari (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on Chile's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month, and to thank you for convening this meeting on the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine. As we begin this new year, I would also like to congratulate the new members of the Council — Angola, Malaysia, New Zealand, Spain and Venezuela — and wish them every success, as well as to congratulate their predecessors — Argentina, Australia, Luxembourg, the Republic of Korea and Rwanda — on their efforts over the past two years.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements made by the representatives of Saudi Arabia, on behalf of the Islamic Organization of Cooperation, and of the Islamic Republic of Iran, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

During the briefing of the Council on 15 December last year, it was said that 2014 had been a disastrous year for the peace process in the Middle East. In the words of Mr. Serry, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East, "I feel that 2014 changed the course of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that the future is more uncertain than ever" (*S/PV.7339, p. 5*). And this came at a time when in January of last year we were hoping that 2014 would be the year when hope returned that we might reach a comprehensive and lasting solutions to the conflict, in line with the vision of two States based on international law and the international terms of reference, including the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Madrid framework and the principle of land for peace. That hope was reinforced with the proclamation of 2014 as the International Year of the Palestinian People.

However, in 2014 the peace negotiations came to a halt, despite the efforts of the United States between July 2013 and April 2014. In July and August 2014 we witnessed the destructive aggression of the occupying Power in the Gaza Strip, which resulted in more than 2,000 casualties including more than 400 children, as well as the wholesale destruction of infrastructure and economic and humanitarian damage on an enormous scale. We also saw a return to violence and tension in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, owing to the occupation forces' continued construction of settlements and the Israeli colonists' violations of Muslim and Christian holy sites, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque, by preventing people who wished to pray from entering them, a flagrant violation of international law and an act of aggression against the religious feelings of Muslims around the world.

Furthermore, the Security Council, the body charged with maintaining international peace and security, has been unable to live up to its responsibilities with regard to the Palestinian question. On 30 December it was unable to adopt a draft resolution (S/2014/916) introduced by Jordan, our brother nation, on behalf of the Arab Group, designed to establish a firm timetable for the negotiations on putting an end to the Israeli occupation and realize the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to live in dignity and freedom in a viable sovereign State within established and recognized borders, living peacefully alongside other countries in the region.

The Palestinian people have been living under the yoke of occupation for more than 48 years and have had to deal with many violations and acts of aggression. That has not deterred them from their commitment over the past 25 years to negotiating within the framework of the relevant resolutions of international law and choosing peace, so that the rights their people have been deprived of can be restored to them, something that was demonstrated in particular by Palestine's accession to a number of international treaties.

In the face of all this, the Israeli side has continued to impose the status quo. The occupying Power has expanded its settlement and occupation activities, increased its aggression against Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and their religious sites. It has blocked any attempt to launch serious peace initiatives, particularly those of the United States, begun in July 2013. The Israeli Government has illegally blocked Palestine's tax income, which represents more than 70 per cent of the Palestinian Government's revenues. We would like to reiterate the call to the entire international community, including the interested parties and the Security Council, to put an end to Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territory and to its illegal practices against the Palestinian people and their financial resources.

It is high time for changes to be made in how we deal with the Palestinian question in the light of a two-State solution. The continuing practices will exacerbate extremism. We therefore demand that the unjust blockade of Gaza be lifted and that humanitarian aid be allowed to enter in order to provide essential assistance to those living in the Gaza Strip in the wake of the Israeli aggression. We also reaffirm the importance of fulfilling the commitments made at the donor conference in Cairo on reconstructing Gaza as soon as possible. A just and comprehensive peace process in the Middle East can be achieved only through Israel's retreat from all the occupied territories, both in Palestine and the Syrian Golan, as well as the remaining occupied territory in southern Lebanon.

In conclusion, I would like to express our deep concern about the deterioration of the situation in Syria, our brother State, and its grave repercussions for Syria, its future, and for the entire region. In that regard, I would like to reaffirm Tunisia's hope that Mr. De Mistura's efforts will result in a political solution that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people to peace and democracy and that at the same time preserves Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and social cohesion.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Kohona (Sri Lanka): I join other speakers in commending you, Sir, for convening this important open debate.

Sri Lanka associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

I congratulate the new members of the Security Council on their elections.

We had hoped that in the year 2014 the world would have witnessed a much-needed breakthrough resulting in a just and durable solution to the situation in the Middle East. Instead we witnessed a series of setbacks, including the breakdown of peace talks followed by a devastating humanitarian crisis in Gaza. However, in the midst of much hardship, we were encouraged by the unwavering support for the people of Palestine worldwide.

The formation of the Palestinian unity Government was indeed a positive development. It is important that the international community continue to strive for a peaceful solution through continued diplomatic engagement with the parties concerned. Peace negotiations need to be conducted expeditiously, and a solution reached consistent with the principles of international law and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and Security Council.

One of the key challenges this year is rebuilding following the destruction caused in Gaza. The international community must also assist the Palestinian people in meeting their day-to-day existential challenges. The Cairo conference on Gaza reconstruction held last

year saw the pledging of significant resources for the Palestinian people's rebuilding efforts. It is our fervent hope that, with the help of the global community, the people of Palestine will rise up to rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

We urge the Governments of Israel and Palestine to utilize the international goodwill that exists to facilitate the peace process. The cost of failing to reach a peace accord is too high for the countries concerned, as well as for the region and beyond. The cessation of settlement activities in the occupied territories and ending the Gaza blockade are important measures that must be taken while respecting the security needs of the people of Israel. These are important measures for confidence-building. They would be consistent with the expectations of the world, the norms of international law and accepted practice. The security needs of the people of Israel must be respected.

Sri Lanka supports a negotiated solution, resulting in a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure, recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel, as endorsed in the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map and the relevant Security Council resolutions. Sri Lanka also supports Palestine's application for admission as a full Member of the United Nations.

Sri Lanka also supports a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders. The viability of the two-State solution will depend upon the political unity and economic advancement of the Palestinian people. The lifting of the Gaza blockade within the framework of the resolution 1860 (2009) would contribute significantly to the economic advancement of Gaza and the well-being of the Palestinian people. At present, the United Nations is hard-pressed to keep the vast majority of the people of Gaza supplied with their minimum necessities. We underline strong support for the work of the United Nations agencies in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Terrorism originating in the Middle East region has the potential to pose a serious threat to the security and stability of many countries. In today's interconnected world, it is very easy for agents of extremism to spread their ideologies across national borders. One of the key excuses of terrorists is the Palestinian issue. We must not provide any excuses for terrorism. We hope that every effort will be made in 2015 to lay the groundwork for the advancement of a peaceful solution to the Middle East peace process. It is our hope that the international community will continue to support initiatives for sustainable peace and that both sides will demonstrate the necessary political will required to achieve that end.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I express my condolences to the people and the Government of France and to the victims of the terrorist attacks in Paris, which my Government has denounced. We condemn any such attacks targeting civilians and violating humanitarian and moral principles.

I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the present month. We express our appreciation to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chile for having participated in this meeting. We also thank the Assistant Secretary-General for his briefing this morning.

We align ourselves with the statements delivered on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Non-Aligned Movement.

We regret that the Security Council was unable to adopt the Arab draft resolution on the situation in the Middle East (S/2014/916), including the question of Palestine, not only because it was a missed opportunity for making progress on implementing peace, but also because the principal elements in the draft resolution were in line with international consensus. There is no disagreement on the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State within the 1967 borders and put an end to the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories.

The Arabs and the Palestinians have taken very flexible steps towards international initiatives in keeping with the basic rights of the Palestinian people, their national unity and their right to establish an independent State. But such steps need support and encouragement from the international community in a number of ways, including by putting an end to the Israeli occupation of all occupied Arab territories, supporting the building of the institutions of the Palestinian State, putting an end to the unjust blockade against the Gaza Strip, assisting in Gaza reconstruction and providing opportunities for a dignified life for all.

The State of Qatar has played and continues to play a positive and effective role with a view to achieving a

just, lasting and sustainable solution to the Palestinian question. We were at the forefront of the States that took important steps to support the opportunities for achieving a peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question. We are also part of the international consensus in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, especially their right to self-determination. That consensus is embodied in several relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and in the successive recognition by most States of the State of Palestine.

In that context, we reiterate our call on the Security Council to implement its previous resolutions and respect international consensus by adopting a binding resolution that obligates Israel to end its occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories, end its settlement activities and all other practices that violate international law and take the necessary actions to implement a clear and time-bound political plan to realize the two-State solution based on well-established principles, including the Arab Peace Initiative.

Peace, stability and security in the region, including the security of Israel, will require genuine steps towards that goal — that is to say, the establishment of a Palestinian State on the basis of the 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living side-by-side in peace with Israel; guarantees for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people; and the withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan, the Sheba'a farms and the Lebanese village of Ghajar. Moreover, all violations of the freedom of worship and of holy sites in Palestine by the Israeli authorities must stop. The Israelis have been implementing a dangerous policy against these places, and we denounce such actions, which bring more violence to the region.

Several months have passed since the Cairo international donors conference on the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, yet the Strip still awaits the fulfilment of reconstruction efforts, which are very important in the light of the destruction of its infrastructure, housing, public facilities and basic services caused by the recent Israeli aggression against that territory. The State of Qatar responded to the dire humanitarian needs by announcing at the Cairo conference that it would provide $1 billion. We are now working to implement the mechanisms for delivering that grant.

This year, the region has witnessed waves of extreme cold that have had a painful and indescribable impact on millions of Syrian and Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The situation requires the international community to fulfil its moral and humanitarian obligations towards these vulnerable populations and to increase its support for them. This very difficult situation must serve as an added incentive to put an end to the crisis. The State of Qatar has responded to the call of the United Nations to continue providing humanitarian and emergency relief for the refugees and the IDPs. We are now at the forefront among donor States for the emergency response fund created by the United Nations for the Syrian crisis, and we call on Member States to respond to the call as well.

The crisis in Syria has entered its fifth year. It is up to all of us to try to put an end to the horrible crimes and terrorism carried out by the regime in Syria, which have promoted instability in the region and the growth of the problem of foreign terrorist fighters. We all agree that the main element of a solution for the Syrian crisis is a political transition, pursuant to the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex), in order to fulfil the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. It is alarming that various Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 2118 (2013), remain unfulfilled.

The most recent report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and its fact-finding mission concerning the use of chlorine gas in Syria established the use of poisonous chemical elements, such as chlorine, in a systematic manner in various attacks. The report has proven that there have been bottle bombs that include chlorine that were thrown from various helicopters. That is a systematic war crime for which the perpetrators must be held responsible.

In conclusion, we reiterate the position of the State of Qatar in support of Syria and its independence and unity based on the Geneva communiqué.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Eler (Turkey): At the outset, let me congratulate the newly elected members of the Security Council and wish them every success.

Developments in the Middle East remain a high priority on the global agenda and continue to affect Turkey in many ways. The Palestinian question still lies at the heart of the challenges in the region and undermines the prospects for lasting regional and global peace and stability. The situation in Palestine remains a major source of concern to us for humanitarian and political reasons alike. The immediate needs of

Palestine in general, and Gaza in particular, constitute a priority for the international community. The situation in Gaza remains fragile and returning to the status quo is not an option. Further steps should be taken to sustain the current ceasefire. The Palestinian Government of National Consensus should operate in Gaza without obstacle, and the illegal blockade must be lifted.

The need to find a negotiated political settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on two States living side by side in peace and security within the pre-1967 borders and in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, remains an urgent priority. Palestinian unity is also imperative to reach a lasting solution. We should all support President Abbas and the Palestinian Government of National Consensus.

Israelis have enjoyed their statehood since 1948, whereas Palestinians have been denied such an inherent right for years. That historical injustice should be remedied. Further expansion of the illegal settlements, settler violence, arrests, forced displacement, house demolitions, excessive use of force against civilians, military raids and incursions, disrespectful and illegal acts targeting the holy sites, and attempts to change the historical status quo of Al-Haram Al-Sharif demonstrate the insincerity of Israel about the peace process. We strongly condemn those provocative acts and will continue to voice our concern in international forums.

It is time for the international community to renew its engagement in seeking a solution to the problem. In that regard, we welcome Sweden's recognition of the State of Palestine and the resolutions adopted by the European Parliament and the national parliaments of some European countries. The ongoing positive trend in Europe demonstrates that it is no longer an option to maintain the status quo. Having said this, we were disappointed by the recent failure of the Security Council to adopt a draft resolution (S/2014/916) that would have paved the way for a solution. The Council missed another opportunity to fulfil its primary responsibility vis-à-vis international peace and security.

The subsequent decision of the State of Palestine to accede to international conventions and protocols, including the Rome Statute, is a sovereign decision and should be respected. On the other hand, the decision of Israel to withhold the tax revenues of Palestine as a reaction to that step is unacceptable and runs counter to its obligations. Turkey will maintain its support for finding a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict and the establishment of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State within the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. We reaffirmed our commitment to this vision during President Abbas's recent official visit to Turkey.

Turkey is gravely concerned by the continuing deterioration of the situation in Syria. We increasingly feel the strain of the current state of chaos due to the grave humanitarian and security situation on the ground. Instability in the region, and Daesh in particular, continue to represent a national security threat for us. As the crisis enters its fifth year, the international community shows signs of Syrian fatigue. The focus is shifting from addressing the root causes of the crisis towards dealing with its side effects. In Syria, the regime, which has taken advantage of the international community's preoccupation with Daesh, has significantly increased its attacks on cities and civilians. It tries to portray itself as a partner in the fight against Daesh and tests the determination of the international community.

The extent and scope of destruction in Syria are unprecedented. With each passing day, the humanitarian toll gets worse. The situation in the north of Syria, particularly in Aleppo, keeps deteriorating, which may lead to another large-scale population exodus. Three million Syrians are in neighbouring countries; half of those are in Turkey. In the face of the enormity of this challenge, I must reiterate that active and meaningful burden-sharing is the collective responsibility of the international community. The international community needs a comprehensive and coordinated strategy with political, security and humanitarian pillars to re-establish stability in Syria. A comprehensive strategy to protect the population from the regime's attacks and to accommodate large-scale refugee movements is necessary. Unless the international community makes the conflict in Syria a common priority and addresses the root cause of the problem through a comprehensive plan and a strategy to reach a genuine political transition, we will continue to face the threat of extremism and all kinds of other problems in the region and elsewhere.

We will continue to support any endeavour to stop the bloodshed in Syria. In that regard, we support Special Envoy De Mistura's efforts. From the security perspective on the matter, I also need to highlight that the destruction of the chemical stockpiles in Syria should not be perceived as accomplished. The

international community and the Security Council should remain seized of the matter.

Let me conclude by reiterating that our strong commitment to the peace and security of the overall region and our full solidarity with the Palestinian people will continue.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Ms. Paik Ji-ah (Republic of Korea): As the Council holds its first quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East of this year, my delegation is disheartened by the continuing instability in the region. Despite all the efforts made by the Security Council over the years to curb the threat of terrorism, in particular through the adoption of resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014) last year, the threat posed by radical terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), continues to spread around the world.

Along with the rest of the international community, the Republic of Korea was shocked and dismayed by the terrorist attack on the Paris office of *Charlie Hebdo*. We strongly condemn such acts of terrorism and offer our deepest condolences and consolation to the bereaved families of the victims and the people of France for their losses. In the aftermath of that tragedy, what is clear to us now is that the volatility in the Middle East affects us all. None of us is free from the long reach of radical extremists. That was the message carried by my Foreign Minister as he traveled to the region last month. Through his meetings with the Prime Minister of Palestine and the Foreign Ministers of Jordan, Israel and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, he highlighted the importance of the Middle East to Korea's foreign policy and reaffirmed Korea's continuing commitment to making constructive contributions to bringing peace and prosperity to the region.

Turning to the situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the Republic of Korea remains concerned about the ongoing tension in those areas. Terror attacks, violent protests and harsh security reprisals remain a daily reality for the civilians living there and have the potential to spill over into a larger conflagration. Although the Gaza ceasefire is being maintained, we are also disconcerted by the slow speed of reconstruction and Gaza's continued isolation.

While working diligently to ease the humanitarian burden in Gaza and promote the lessening of tensions in the West Bank, we must keep in mind, however, that the only long-term solution to the ongoing conflict is a negotiated settlement with the two-State solution as its essence. Unilateral actions will not achieve that vision, and we urge all parties to respect previous agreements and return to the negotiating table with a view towards ensuring a brighter future for all.

On Syria, the Republic of Korea continues to be deeply concerned about the unprecedented scale of impunity and terror. The international community, including the Council, simply must do more to end the conflict and lessen the suffering of the Syrian people. The current humanitarian situation is extremely grim, with over 7.6 million Syrian internally displaced persons and 3.8 million Syrian refugees living difficult lives in neighbouring States. Humanitarian access within Syria remains hindered by all parties, in spite of the series of resolutions adopted to address the problem. On our part, the Republic of Korea delivered 300 temporary housing units to Syrian refugees in Jordan in December, bringing our total humanitarian assistance for Syrian refugees to $13 million.

ISIL remains a global scourge that ruthlessly controls sizeable territory in two States through terror and is inspiring the actions of radicalized extremists beyond Syria and Iraq. Recent images of conscripted child soldiers taking part in executions, as well as the sexual enslavement of ethnic minorities, are extremely disturbing. The international community must do its utmost to end that tragedy.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Percaya (Indonesia): Let me begin by joining previous speakers in welcoming Mr. Heraldo Muñoz, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chile, and thanking the Chilean presidency for convening this open debate. I would also like to thank the Assistant Secretary-General ad interim for his comprehensive briefing.

Allow me also to congratulate the new non-permanent members of the Security Council: Angola, Malaysia, New Zealand, Spain and Venezuela.

Indonesia associates itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia on behalf of the Non-Aligned

Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, respectively.

I wish to focus my statement on the question of Palestine and underline the importance of the debate with a view of devising a way forward after the Council failed to adopt the draft resolution on Palestine (S/2014/916) in its deliberations on 30 December last year (see S/PV.7354).

When the General Assembly declared the year 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, it was our fervent hope that the year would witness a substantial breakthrough in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. What we witnessed, instead, was the collapse of the peace process and the rise of an explosive situation at the expense of many civilian casualties, especially in Gaza. Sadly, we also witnessed the insufficient response of the Council.

Nonetheless, wider recognition of the State of Palestine, as well as other expressions of support on the part of the international community last year are true testimony to the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people. With all of those in mind, as we enter the year 2015, I would like to reiterate Indonesia's view that it is high time for the Security Council to fulfil the demand of the Palestinian people to set a deadline for Israel to end its occupation.

Indonesia deeply regrets the failure of the Security Council to adopt the draft resolution on Palestine in December. We sincerely believe that it was indeed an opportunity lost when the draft resolution, which resulted from deliberations between Palestine and other important key actors and aimed at realizing the inalienable rights of the Palestinians, failed to be adopted. The refusal of the Council to look favourably on the request of Palestine clearly calls into question the very principles of justice and humanity upon which the United Nations is founded. Such action — or inaction, if one prefers — of the Council on that critical agenda item may also be interpreted as an authorization of the odious practices of occupation and the subjugation of people. There can be no argument against the point that such conduct is counterproductive to the efforts to create stability in the occupied Palestinian territory and end the cycle of violence in Palestine.

Indonesia is unceasing in its belief that a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement must be attained peacefully, based, inter alia, on relevant United Nations resolutions, the road map of the Quartet and the Arab Peace Initiative. It is therefore important for the United Nations not to remain on the sidelines in pursuit of a comprehensive, peaceful solution to the question of Palestine. The United Nations must play a more substantial role within the Quartet to ensure that the peace process is restarted.

On a different matter, the United Nations must also shoulder the international responsibility to protect civilians on behalf of the Palestinian people, including by considering the urgency of Palestine's proposal to be placed under the United Nations protection mechanism. Furthermore, the international community should support the work of the Human Rights Council's commission of inquiry on Palestine.

In conclusion, Indonesia shall remain unyielding in its support for the independence of the Palestinian people and for East Jerusalem being their capital. Indonesia will continue to support the Palestinian initiative to strengthen its engagement in the global arena and search for international support through membership in various organizations. For people who have long been subjected to occupation and oppression, those peaceful means are a courageous move, and they deserve to be rewarded by encouragement and not criticism, let alone punishment.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan): I would like to express my sincere appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting on the situation in the Middle East. As this is the first time that I address the Security Council this year, I would like to congratulate the five newly elected members on their membership in the Council and to wish them good luck in their work in the Council.

The Gaza conflict that occurred in July 2014 was the third major conflict in six years. The ensuing tensions on the ground have served to underscore the need for a just, durable and comprehensive peace between Israel and Palestine based on a two-State solution.

Faced with that difficult situation, the international community has not stood idly by. The Gaza reconstruction conference hosted by Egypt and Norway in October 2014 demonstrated the strong international commitment to reconstruction. Japan, for its part, has already disbursed the $20 million it pledged at the conference. That is part of the $200 million commitment announced by Foreign Minister Kishida in March 2014.

Furthermore, starting tomorrow, my Prime Minister, Mr. Shinzo Abe, will embark on a visit to the Middle East. In Israel and Palestine, Prime Minister Abe will call on the leaders of both sides to work towards a resumption of the peace negotiations. In a policy speech to be made on 17 January in Cairo, he will also confirm Japan's commitment to assist with the attainment of peace and prosperity in the region.

I would like to mention with great appreciation the concerted efforts that the United States has been making towards the resumption of peace negotiations. However, the recent series of events have made the prospects for the resumption of peace talks increasingly precarious.

The Middle East peace process will only be successful once a consensual and negotiated agreement is reached between the parties. Nonetheless, in the light of the impasse on the ground, we welcome and value the efforts of a number of Member States seeking to bring the Security Council to play a constructive role. Although the Council was not able to convey a concerted message two weeks ago, we look forward to the Council engaging constructively in the peace process as appropriate and when necessary.

No amount of support by the international community, including the Security Council, can substitute for Israel and Palestine's own efforts and political will to achieve peace. To that end, we underscore the need for both sides to nurture an environment propitious to the resumption of peace negotiations.

Unilateral measures and punitive countermeasures lead only to a vicious cycle of mistrust. We therefore call on Israel to resume the transfer of tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority, as agreed to under the Paris Protocol of 1994. We also reiterate our call to completely cease settlement activities, which are illegal under international law. In turn, we call on Palestine to refrain from taking any unilateral measures that could undermine efforts for the resumption of peace negotiations.

The current impasse and tensions on the ground should not dissuade us from looking ahead. Efforts to build a sustainable economy in Palestine and promote mutual trust between the two peoples will reinforce the political process, and therefore must continue. In the light of that, Japan has been steadfast in providing support in those areas from a mid- and long-term perspective.

Due to time limitations, I will not go into the details of our efforts, which are reflected in the written text of my statement, which I believe has already been distributed to the Council.

I would also like to refer to the situations in Iraq and Syria, which are of great concern. But for the same reason, I would refer members to the written text of my statement.

Japan is mindful of the unique and constructive role it can play in assisting countries in the region to achieve peace and prosperity. We stand ready to continue our cooperation with the United Nations and the international community in that regard.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Peru.

Mr. Thornberry (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to welcome the holding of this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and to express my appreciation for the briefing by the Assistant Secretary-General ad interim for Political Affairs, Mr. Jens Anders Toyberg-Frandzen.

With regard to the question of Palestine, my country has consistently maintained a clear position of respect for the norms and principles of international law, in particular peoples' right to self-determination. Therefore, Peru recognizes the urgent need to implement the resolutions of the General Assembly aimed at laying the foundation for the creation of two States, one Arab and one Jewish, living side by side, within secure and mutually recognized borders, in a climate of peace and security.

Based on our belief in the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and on our conviction that the establishment of a Palestinian State is the key to a peaceful and definitive political solution to this conflict, Peru recognizes Palestine as a State. We therefore sponsored General Assembly resolution 67/19, through which Palestine was granted non-member observer State status.

Peru condemned Israel's use of disproportionate military force against densely populated urban areas in the Gaza Strip last year and the rocket fire from Gaza directed against Israeli civilians. However, despite the

calls for a ceasefire by the international community, over 2,100 people were killed in the Gaza Strip, mainly Palestinian civilians, including women and children. Consistent with our strict respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, therefore, Peru voted for resolution S-21/1 of the Human Rights Council, in which, in addition to deploring the attacks, the Council called on Israel to put an end to its illegal settlement activities and its blockade of the Gaza Strip.

My country recognizes the inalienable right of Israel to protect its own existence and security, including by making use of their right to legitimate self-defence. However, we believe that the exercise of that right must be carried out based on international humanitarian law, taking into account in particular the principles of proportionality and legality.

On that last point, my delegation reiterates that the acquisition of territory by force is inadmissible under international law. Therefore any action to impose laws, jurisdiction and administration in such settlements is null and void. In this regard, we reiterate our call on Israel to immediately cease the practices of settlement-building, house demolitions and evictions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Consistent with its unwavering commitment to the peaceful settlement of disputes, Peru reaffirms its full support and encourages the search for a lasting peace in the Middle East. After decades of an unsustainable status quo, we consider it urgent for the Council, pursuant to its obligations and responsibilities for maintaining international peace and security, to effectively promote the peace process. Peru recognizes that the ultimate solution can be achieved only as a result of negotiations among the parties in the framework of the obligations set out in the Madrid principles, the road map of the Quartet and other agreements, and with full respect for international law, including the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the Organization.

The Security Council should promote a minimum framework of understanding that would allow the parties to resume direct negotiations. My delegation therefore regrets that the Council was unable to adopt a decision in December. The result of the voting on 30 December (see S/PV.7354) should be construed not as a license to maintain the status quo, but as a call to action, negotiation and compromise. In this regard, my delegation reiterates its call on the parties to resume, on the basis of good faith, the peace process in the Middle East. Only thus will the goal of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947 — Palestinians and Israelis living in peace in two States within secure and internationally recognized borders — be finally achieved.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to congratulate Chile on its accession to the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I wish you full success, Sir, in fulfilling your mandate.

We commend Chad for the way in which it discharged its duties as President of the Council last month.

Kuwait aligns itself with the statements made by the representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on behalf of of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

More than six decades have elapsed with the question of Palestine on the United Nations agenda. It has been repeatedly debated and many resolutions have been adopted thereon. However, the situation remains unresolved and the relevant decisions have gone unimplemented because the occupying Power, Israel, is intransigeant and openly refuses to implement the resolutions of international legitimacy, while the international community has proved regrettably powerless to compel the occupying Power to implement its resolutions.

The rejection on 30 December 2014 of the Arab draft resolution (S/2014/916), which reaffirmed the resolutions of international legitimacy demanding an end to the occupation, gave Israel a green light to pursue its practices by entrenching the occupation. Indeed, it undermined any opportunity to achieve a genuine peace that would restore the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including their rights to independence, sovereignty and a dignifed existence, which are the most fundamental of basic rights.

The illegitimate and illegal Israel practices in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, continue unabated. They have exacerbated the suffering of the Palestinian people, who are experiencing extremely trying economic and social conditions, particularly in the Gaza Strip, which has

been regularly subject to aggression, including air raids and tank attacks, leading to ever-growing human and material losses. The pursuit of such attacks and aggressions and the maintenance of the inhumane siege imposed on Gaza are the inevitable outcome of the Security Council's failure to take any step to deter Israel and compel it to end its repeated attacks and to respect its international commitments as the occupying Power, in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

Israel is also perpetrating the most heinous of practices and flagrantly violating human rights and international humanitarian law. Houses and other property are being expropriated and demolished; thousands of civilians are being arrested and detained; and illegal settlement activities continue in the occupied Palestinian territories. New settlements are being built while old ones are expanded and Palestinian landowners dispersed. In that context, we call on the Security Council to shoulder its Charter responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security and to take the steps necessary to relaunch the peace process.

Some days ago, Israel, the occupying Power, refused to transfer Palestinian tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority, in clear violation of its obligations, in response to Palestine's legitimate quest to accede to a number of international treaties and agreements, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. While we welcome the declaration issued at the Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, held in Geneva last month, we stress the importance of its implementation and of launching an investigation into all Israel's violations of international humanitarian law and bringing the perpetrators to justice.

A just, lasting and comprehensive peace will not be achieved by resuming sterile, direct and open-ended negotiations or by remaining silent vis-à-vis grave policies that represent a major obstacle to any genuine opportunity to end the occupation. The desired peace must be based on the resolutions of international legitimacy, the principle of land for peace, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative. The Security Council is bound by the Charter of the United Nations to assume its responsibilities to that end.

Concerning the situation in Syria, we believe that there is a definite need for a political settlement to the crisis based on the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex), calling for a transitional authority with full executive powers to meet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. In that regard, we support the efforts of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and his Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura. We express our deep concern over the unprecedented humanitarian tragedy being endured by more than 12 million Syrians in the gravest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War.

On the basis of its moral and humanitarian responsibility vis-à-vis the suffering of our brother Syrians, the State of Kuwait will host the third donors conference to confront the humanitarian crisis. We call on Member States to participate in the conference and to be generous in the face of the overwhelming humanitarian needs, which the United Nations estimates to amount to $8.4 billion. Coordination will be undertaken with the Organization in the coming weeks to set the date for the conference.

In conclusion, Kuwait reiterates its call on Israel to implement resolution 497 (1981), calling for its withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan and return to the lines of 4 June 1967. We also reiterate our commitment to standing by the Government of Lebanon. We support all steps to maintain the security, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon and call on Israel to end all violations of that country's sovereignty, pursuant to resolution 1701 (2006).

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Liechtenstein.

Mr. Barriga (Liechtenstein): My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union. I will add only a few words, on the subject of criminal accountability.

Liechtenstein welcomes the recent ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) by the State of Palestine. As an active State party to the Rome Statute, we are fully committed to the goal of an ICC with universal reach. Palestine's ratification is especially important and significant given the small number of States parties in the Middle East. Other States from the region should follow that example.

We are aware of the long and complex history that provides the political context for this ratification. Nevertheless, any ratification of the Rome Statute should first and foremost be seen as what it is: a legally binding, multilateral commitment to ending impunity

for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, with a view to preventing such crimes from occurring in the first place.

The ICC is not a one-sided political tool that can be employed by a party to a conflict. The ICC cannot be used to sue any specific person or country. Should an investigation be opened in Palestine, any and all Rome Statute crimes committed on Palestinian territory can be scrutinized, no matter who committed them. Furthermore, the principle of complementarity applies. The ICC — because it has to under the Rome Statute — will yield to investigations and prosecutions genuinely undertaken by States with jurisdiction over the crimes.

We believe that the recent ratification will open the door for the rule of law to make its mark in this long-standing conflict. Will the politics on the ground get in the way of justice taking its course? Will the States concerned cooperate with a potential investigation by the Court? It is too early to tell, but we are convinced that the Court itself, as an independent and impartial institution, is fully equipped to fulfil its mandate in accordance with the rule of law.

Almost exactly two years ago, 58 States, including my country, requested the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the ICC. Regrettably, that request was answered with a double veto. That cannot be the end of the conversation about accountability in Syria. Recently, the General Assembly transmitted to the Council all of the reports of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria. The Council must not close its eyes to the overwhelming evidence of massive and heinous crimes being committed. That would be an affront to thousands of victims and their families.

While the demand for an ICC referral remains as valid as ever, we must explore all options that can contribute to bringing some measure of justice to the victims of crimes in Syria. One can find some thoughts on this matter in the summary on our webside concerning the small workshop hosted by Liechtenstein last November at Princetown University. For example, domestic prosecutions based on the "passive/active personality" principle or on universal jurisdiction could make a meaningful contribution. ICC States parties could also refer the situation in Syria to the ICC to the extent that crimes are committed by their nationals as foreign fighters.

There can be no lasting peace without justice. If we are to find solutions for the seemingly intractable conflicts that plague the Middle East, accountability for the most serious crimes under international law must form part of them.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Zimbabwe.

Mr. Ntonga (Zimbabwe): I have the honour to speak on behalf of members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

As this is the first time we take the floor during your presidency of the Security Council, Sir, allow me at the outset to congratulate you on assuming the presidency for the month of January. I also thank you for convening this open debate at a critical time for the Palestinian people. May I also take this opportunity to congratualte the new members of the Council on their assuming membership of this organ. I welcome the constructive ideas they have offered for finding a resolution to the long-standing Palestinian question. I would also like to express gratitude to Assistant Secretary General ad interim Jens Toyberg-Frandzen for his insightful briefing.

SADC aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

SADC wishes to take this opportunity to reaffirm and support the Palestinian people's legitimate national aspirations and inalienable rights, including to self-determination and freedom, in their independent State of Palestine based on the two-State solution.

It is regrettable that the Security Council has once again let down the Palestinian people by failing to uphold its responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations during the voting on Palestine on 30 December 2014 (see S/PV.7354). The result of the recent voting on the draft resolution on the independence of Palestine (S/2014/916) demonstrated that members of the Security Council are divided on the need for the Council to shoulder its responsibilities despite apparent consensus within the Council itself and overwhelming international consensus that the status quo is not sustainable.

The draft resolution demanding an end to the Israeli occupation of the occupied territories by 2017 was in line with the United Nations proposal on the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders.

Despite Security Council consensus on the matter and declarations around the globe calling for an end to the 47-year Israeli military occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people, the Security Council remains paralysed and unable to act to ease their suffering. A draft resolution delineating a time frame to end Israeli occupation would have restored hope to the Palestinian people that their oppression would soon come to an end. The recent accession by the State of Palestine to several international conventions and treaties, including the Rome Statute, is a testimony of the Palestinian leadership's commitment to international law.

It is regrettable that the Security Council is failing to meaningfully contribute to a peaceful solution in the Middle East even as the situation continues to deteriorate and threaten the stability of the region and global peace and security.

Israel, the occupying Power, undermines all peace efforts supported by some within the Council, under the guise of the right to self-defense. The occupying Power also continues to escalate settlement construction, in violation of various United Nations resolutions, including those adopted by the Council. SADC condemns the occupying Power's flagrant, systematic violations of international law in the occupied territory. We reiterate our call to the Security Council to play a more active role to encourage the resumption of peace talks. SADC supports negotiations towards a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East leading to the restoration of the Palestinian people's legitimate right to establish an independent State coexisting peacefully with the State of Israel.

The recent wave of motions by numerous European Parliaments to recognize the Palestinian State is affirmation that international consensus demands an end to the occupation of Palestinian land. SADC urges the Security Council to honour its Charter obligations by acting resolutely to end the suffering of the Palestinian people and ending the decades-long injustice at the hands of the occupying Power.

SADC reaffirms its unflinching support and long-standing solidarity with the Palestinian people in the quest to realize their inalienable rights and legitimate national aspirations for freedom, justice, dignity and peace.

We wish to conclude by expressing our support for the initiative by the Russian Federation to convene a meeting of all parties to the Syrian conflict. We hope that the dialogue will contribute to finding a solution to that conflict.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Botswana.

Mr. Nkoloi (Botswana): Let me express my delegation's profound gratitude to you, Sir, for convening this crucial debate. We appreciate this opportunity to continue to engage the Security Council on matters of international peace and security. Our appreciation also goes to the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs for his comprehensive briefing this morning.

At the very outset, we wish to align ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Zimbabwe on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), as well as the one to be delivered by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Africa Group.

We welcome the Council's tradition of discussing the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, in an effort to engage the international community and to share ideas on how we can work together to contribute to peace and prosperity in the Middle East.

My delegation ha and continues to follow with keen interest the socioeconomic and political developments in the Middle East, particularly in Syria and Iraq and on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Of particular concern is the fact that extremist activities and terrorist attacks perpetrated against innocent civilian populations in the region and the world continue unabated.

My delegation will remain steadfast in condemning all forms of human rights violations, whenever and wherever they occur. As the custodian of international peace and security, we urge the Security Council to work in unison to condemn such violations and bring the perpetrators book.

The recent bomb attack of 7 January 2015 at the Police Academy in Sana'a, which killed at least 37 and injured many more, as well as the terrorist attack in Lebanon on 10 January, is not only horrific but should be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

On the situation in Syria, my delegation would like to express its continued support for the people of Syria and to call for an end to the humanitarian tragedy besieging the people of that country. We are particularly concerned about the plight of the millions of women and children who have been displaced and are without food,

shelter and medical care. We call on the international community, as well as on humanitarian organizations the world over, to respond in kindness and care to the refugees of Syria.

On the question of the Palestine, Botswana continues to believe that there is no alternative to the two-State solution. The importance of the coexistence of Israel and Palestine living side by side as two sovereign States cannot be overemphasized. That will not only be of value to the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples, but will contribute to the regional stability and offer new opportunities for the region as a whole. My delegation believes that the peace process, where all parties, including the international community, are involved, could usher in the desired peace and stability so longed for in the region.

The reality is that violence is not sustainable and cannot bring about peace. The people of Israel and the people of Palestine both need sustainable peace and development if they are to prosper. That can be attained only if there is opportunity and growth in an environment of peace in the Middle East. It is my delegation's belief that this should be augmented by both regional and international support. We furthermore call on the parties to create an environment of mutual trust throughout the negotiations in order to safeguard the integrity of the negotiations, lest they be undermined.

In conclusion, Botswana believes that a stable and peaceful Middle East is in the broader interests of the peoples, the region and the world community as a whole.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Hilale (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I also thank you for your initiative to hold this debate on a subject to which my country attaches the utmost importance based on our Arab and Islamic commitment. We would also like to thank Assistant Secretary-General ad interim Toyberg-Frandzen for briefing this morning on the most recent developments in the Middle East, especially concerning the Palestinian question.

Today's meeting is being held following yet another year when the Palestinian people held out the hope for a better future and for fulfilling their dream to establish an independent Palestinian State along the 4 June 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. That hope was engendered by the peace talks launched in July 2013 under the auspices of the United States of America, and it was encouraged by the General Assembly's adoption of a resolution to declare 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. That hope was also fuelled by the fact that Palestinians came together to establish the Government of National Consensus to faciliate the two-State solution. However, hope is now illusory. This issue is still unresolved and the situation is worsening. As a poet once said, existence is a heavy burden and there is no hope. However, there is still hope in the hearts of peace-loving people.

Talks have stalled owing to Israeli obstinacy. The world saw unjustified aggression against the Gaza Strip that resulted in more than 2,000 martyrs, including old people, women and children. It also produced thousands of wounded and displaced persons whose homes and property were destroyed and who now are exposed to the elements. Worse yet, in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law and international humanitarian law, it was civilians themselves who were targeted. Schools, even those of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in which the displaced had taken refuge, were targeted. All of this has produced a disastrous humanitarian situation from which the Palestinian people continue to suffer. We reject those actions, which will lead only to greater extremism, violence and hatred.

The systematic plans to clamp down on the Palestinians extend as well to religious practices, including opening up access to the Al-Aqsa Mosque to incompatible use. Efforts are also being made to Judaize important religious sites. That is a major provocation to the religious sentiments not just of Palestinians, but of Muslims throughout the world.

From the beginning, Morocco's King, Government and people have condemned this Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people in Gaza. At the instruction of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, Morocco has provided humanitarian and financial assistance to the Palestinian people as a sign of solidarity, in particular in the context of rebuilding Gaza.

His Majesty, who chairs the Al-Quds Committee, is very concerned about the situation of the Palestinian people, especially the situation in East Jerusalem. That concern extends to the Judaization of the Holy City, the ongoing settlement policy, the displacement of people

and the repeated violations against the sacred nature of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and against worshipers. We are also gravely concerned about attemps to obliterate the legal status of East Jerusalem as established under international law: since 1967, East Jerusalem has been considered as occupied Palestinian territory.

On ideological terms, all of this is giving rise to questions of a religious nature. It is for that reason that His Majesty the King convened a meeting of the Al-Quds Committee at Marrakesh last January. The meeting's final communiqué reiterated the central nature and the role of East Jerusalem for the Muslim Ummah. That is a key element of any political resolution to the crisis. Any violation of the Al-Aqsa Mosque will lead only to further violence and tenstion.

Following the ministerial meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, a futher coordination meeting was held in Rabat on 12 November 2014, which issued a call to influential parties as to the need to defend the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The meeting also reasserted the right of the Palestinian people to establish a State for the sake of peace and and security.

On numerous ocassions, both bilaterally and at international events, His Majesty the King has emphasized the need to put an end to the occupation and Judaization of Jerusalem. He has also sent a message to the Pope in which he expressed the seriousness of the situation.

On 30 December 2014, the international community had an important opportunity to consider a draft resolution on ending the occupation (S/2014/916), which was submitted by Jordan. Unfortunately, that opportunity was missed. The Kingdom of Morocco will continue to support all efforts to create a Palestinian State along the June 1967 borders.

The Syrian situation is growing worse by the day at every level. That has repercussions not only for the Syrian people but for all States in the region in the Middle East. It is therefore necessary to bring and end to this crisis, the price of which is being paid by the people of Syria. Thousands of people have died, while millions have been displaced. Policies are aimed at producing displacement, famine, hunger and the destruction of infrastructure and the means of survival. We demand that access be granted for humanitarian and medical assistance. In that regard, we support the implementation of resolutions 2139 (2014) and 2165 (2014).

In that regard, Morocco has helped to set up a mobile hospital in the Za'atari refugee camp. Through the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, we are also supporting efforts to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.

We reiterate the need to preserve the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria. We support Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura in finding a political solution and launching a democratic transition on the basis of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), so as to prevent any further destruction.

Morocco has not changed its position with regard to its support for the independence and territorial integrity of Lebanon. We commend the entire Lebanese people for their patriotism and responsible attitude in safeguarding the country's security, stability and sovereignty. We are convinced that Lebanon's wisdom will prevent that country from being drawn into the Syrian crisis. In that regard, we condemn the recent terrorist bombing in Tripoli, which resulted in many innocent victims.

The situation in Yemen remains of great concern. Terrorist acts are increasing. Senior political, security and military officials were recently assassinated. Cadets were also attacked recently at the police academy. Such acts of sabotage and terrorism are serving only to worsen the situation. They are undermining the consensus and coooperation that made possible an agreement on the National Dialogue. This will hamper the holding of the constitutional referendum and the presidential and parliamentary elections. We therefore call upon all Yemeni political stakeholders to safeguard their State, implement the outcome of the National Dialogue, support the initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council in its entiretly and to support the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, so as to realize the aspirations of the people of Yemen to create a democratic and modern State that respects human rights and freedoms and meets the aspirations for economic and social development. We call upon brotherly and friendly States to provide support to Yemen so that it can overcome the current situation and achieve stability and development.

We cannot talk about the Middle East today without dealing with the scourge of terrorism, which is a threat not just for the region but the entire world. The growth of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), along with its crimes, attacks and killings,

is an illustration of that threat. Terrorist groups that, whatever they are called — Al-Qaida, Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, Daesh, ISIS, Boko Haram or the Nusra Front — cloak themselves in religion to justify their expansionist and exclusionist political and ideological goals in fact have nothing whatever to do with Islam — to the contrary, they go against a religion that calls for unity and coexistence.

Let us be vigilant. Let us not allow the terrorists create disagreement among States or religions. We reiterate our condemnation of terrorism in every form. We also reiterate the need not to associate terrorism with any State, people, ethnic group or religion. We must face up to this scourge through cooperation. In that connection, the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters must be confronted robustly so as to eradicate it, and we emphasize resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014) in that regard.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of Israel has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Nitzan (Israel): At each and every open debate, the representative of Saudi Arabia uses this platform arrogantly to accuse my country of abusing human rights and violating the freedom of religion. And yet the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a world leader in abusing human rights. In the Islamic State of Saudi Arabia, nine people were beheaded so far this year. We are not talking historically, we are talking about just the past two weeks. In the Islamic State of Saudi Arabia, a blogger was sentenced to 1,000 lashes for running a website promoting free speech. And in the Islamic State of Saudi Arabia, 87 people were executed last year, while 78 people were executed in 2013.

In response to the Syrian statement, I would like to quote the figures published today by Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura. The Syrian Government is solely responsible for the deaths of 220,000 Syrians. Twelve million people are in need in Syria. Seven million six hundred thousand people are displaced. And 3.3 million refugees have left Syria. No inflammatory statements or barage of lies can disguise those facts.

In his briefing this morning, the Assistant Secretary General ad interim referred to a letter that my delegation wrote regarding Hizbullah's military capabilities. I note that the Secretariat did not report that the missiles and weapons being supplied to Hizbullah were coming directly from the Islamic Republic of Iran, and it is very important to emphasize that point. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard is a Security Council-designated entity responsible for the murder of the tens of thousands of civilians in the Middle East, and behind countless terror attacks around the world.

Mr. Gálvez took the Chair.

Even as the Security Council was debating the situation in the Middle East today, Hizbullah chief Hassan Nasrallah was making more threatening statements on Lebanese television. He said that

> "despite the current preoccupations, Hizbullah is completely ready to face Israel... Hizbullah is ready to invade Israel's Galilee and beyond during any upcoming war... Hizbullah is working to contrive the greatest victory in its wars against Israel".

Nasrallah said this only a few hours ago. Iran and its proxies, be it the Syrian Government or Hizbullah, are a threat to international peace and security, and it is time to seriously address this threat.

I also found it amusing that the Turkish representative said that the Palestinian issue is a priority for Turkey. Turkey is currently providing a platform for the terrorist activities of Hamas. Hamas terrorists freely operate on Turkish soil, instructing and financing Hamas terrorist operations against Israel. As we speak, Turkey's sponsorship of terrorism in the Middle East should also be a priority for the Council.

Israel is fully committed to finding a political solution with the Palestinian Authority. Israel is committed to the solution of two States for two peoples through, and only through, direct negotiations between the parties. There is no alternative to negotiations. Many have talked today about the importance of direct negotiations, but let me also remind the Council that it was President Abbas who flew to Doha, Qatar, a few months ago, despite the efforts of the United States, and chose Hamas over peace talks with Israel.

That was not the first time that this has happened; it happened also in 2012 when, just as we were on the verge of a breakthrough, Abbas abandoned the talks and flew to Doha to sign a unity deal with Hamas. I would remind the Council that Hamas is a designated terrorist organization and recognized as such around the world. Still in 2012, a few months later the Palestinian leadership went to the United Nations seeking to bypass direct negotiations. That also happened at the end of last year with the draft resolution presented by

the Palestinians (S/2014/916) and other unilateral steps taken by the Palestinians — all to avoid direct talks. It is much easier to travel to New York than to negotiate directly with the Prime Minister of Israel in Jerusalem.

Finally, I would like to conclude by reminding a certain Security Council member who referred to the work of the Council in 2014 that the Council also worked on a draft resolution to bring a solution to the Gaza Strip by facilitating the entry into Gaza of construction materials. However, that draft resolution was singlehandedly rejected by the Palestinian Authority.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of Saudi Arabia has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Alyas (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I find it strange that as we meet today to discuss the issue of the Middle East and the question of Palestine, and the representative of Israel has openly attacked countries that have stood on the side of right and against his country's aggressions, the delegation of Israel has raised domestic issues that are none of its concern. That is hardly surprising, considering that Israel is known to misrepresent the truth and to violate the rights of the Palestinian people and international law on a daily basis.

I congratulate the representative of Israel for returning, towards the end of his statement, to the topic under discussion today. Unfortunately, he also mocked those present here by claiming that Israel is committed to the peace process.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of Israel has asked to speak one last time. I give him the floor, while urging him to be very brief.

Mr. Nitzan (Israel): I would like to reply to the statement made just now by the representative of Saudi Arabia. If we are talking about the situation in the Middle East, we cannot ignore the Saudi Wahabi radicalism that is at the heart of Middle East terrorism. Saudi Arabia supports, finances and supplies arms to terrorist organizations in the region, and not only in the region. The terrorist organizations in Africa that have been mentioned earlier today — Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Boko Haram — are all born and sponsored out of Saudi radicalism.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.